

“Savior”

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“Savior,” like “to save” and “salvation,” is a word of frequent occurrence in the OT.

It occurs mostly in the form of the ptcl. Hiph. of שׁע = מוֹשִׁיעַ. For the specific meaning of “to save” in distinction from other cognate Hebrew verbs, cf. article “Salvation.” Most commonly God is called the Savior of Israel or individuals. A standing combination is “God the Savior” often with a possessive genitive (1 Chronicles 16:35; Psalm 24:5; 27:1, 9; 62:2, 6; 65:5; 79:9; 95:1; Isaiah 12:2; 17:10; Micah 7:7; Habakkuk 3:18). To be a Savior is God’s exclusive prerogative (Psalm 60:11; 108:12; Isaiah 43:11; 45:22). As instruments of God, however, human deliverers likewise receive the title (Judges 3:9, 15; Nehemiah 9:27). There is no passage in the OT where the Messiah is called “Savior.” Wherever the Messiah is connected with the idea of salvation, He is not the subject but the object of it (Psalm 28:8; 144:10; Zechariah 9:9). This is different in Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical literature, for here it is not merely declared that in the name of the Son of Man the people are saved, and that He is the Goel of their life (En. 48:7), or that the righteous in connection with Him shall be satisfied with salvation (4 Ezz. 45:6), but also that *Christus liberabit creaturam* (4 Ezz. 12:34; 13:26), and that from Judah and Levi the Lord will raise a Savior for Israel (Test. Gad. 8). God, however, here also is more frequently called Savior (ταντων σωτηρ, Ps. Sol. 16:7; αιωνιος σωτηρ, Bar. 4:22; αγιος σωτηρ, 3 Macc. 6:29; 7:16). Used of God, σωτηρ is synonymous with such terms as לַיְהוָה, ο ριστης, ο λυτρουμενος (En. 48:7, 1 Macc. 4:11, 3 Macc. 7:23).

1. In the Gospels σωτηρ occurs but three times – Luke 1:47, 2:11 and John 4:42. In the Song of Mary, the words “My spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior” are a reproduction of the common OT usage. In Luke 2:11 σωτηρ is not a formal title, but a descriptive designation of the Messiah, “a Savior who is Christ the Lord.” But the word evidently has a deeper meaning to the angels than the noun σωτηρια and the participle ρυσθεντας have to Zacharias in Luke 1:71, 74; for in the two latter passages the conception moves entirely within the OT limits. The doxology of Luke 2:14 associates Jesus’ saving work with the production of peace on earth among mankind as the objects of God’s good pleasure. Here σωτηρ undoubtedly covers the Lord’s Messianic work in the most universalistic sense. And it will be noticed that σωτηρ is synonymous with χριστος κυριος, so that the reference cannot be confined to our Lord’s earthly ministry, but extends to His activity as the glorified Messiah. As “peace” and “good pleasure” indicate, not the giving of life but the bestowal of reconciliation with God stands in the foreground (for the connection between σωτηρ and ευδοκια, cf. Ps-Sol. 8:39). In John 4:42 ο σωτηρ του κοσμου receives its import from the rich and pregnant meaning σωζειν and σωτηρια acquire in the discourses of the Fourth Gospel. As Jesus had represented Himself to the woman not as a mere revealer (vv. 19, 26), but as the giver of “living water,” and “water unto eternal life” (vv. 10, 14), so the Samaritans, in acknowledging Him as σωτηρ του κοσμου, prove to have attained a deeper conception of Messiahship than was commonly current among them, both as to the nature and extent of the Messiah’s calling (cf., however, for σωτηρ του κοσμου, 4 Ezz. 13:26).

2. The fact has not escaped observation, that St. Luke, who alone of the Synoptists introduces into his record the word σωτηρ, also employs it twice in Acts, where it occurs once in a speech of St. Peter (5:31), and once in a speech of St. Paul (13:23). In 5:31 we have the combination αρχηγος και σωτηρ: Christ was made both by the Resurrection and by the Ascension. αρχηγος is found also in

Acts 3:15, another speech of St. Peter, and is here combined with ζωη; the Jews asked for a murderer to be granted them and killed the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead. It is plain that the meaning of σωτηρ in 5:31 is determined by that of αρχηγος, and 3:15 proves that αρχηγος has specifically to do with Jesus' life-giving power, whence also in both passages the Resurrection is emphasized. Besides Luke, Hebrews is the only NT writing which employs αρχηγος (2:10; 12:2). The former of these two passages confirms the close connection already found between σωτηρ and αρχηγος, for it calls Jesus αρχηγος σωτηριας; in the other passage He is called αρχηγος και τελειωτης πιστεως, "the leader and perfecter of faith." (For a thorough discussion of αρχηγος, cf. Bleek, *Der Brief a. d. Hebräer*, 2:301-303). The use of the word in combination with σωτηρ is interesting, because both are employed in the LXX of the "judges" sent by God to deliver Israel (Judges 3:9-15; 11:6, 11; 12:3 [σωτηρ=משׁע, αρχηγος=י׳צק]). In Hebrews, however, the rendering "captain," which brings out the idea of military leadership, and the general rendering "author," are inadequate; the word plainly has the connotation of "model," "example," "forerunner," the leader first experiencing in Himself that to which he leads others. Thus Jesus is αρχηγος σωτηριας in 2:10, because He Himself is conducted to glory by God, and in His attainment to glory draws with Him all the other sons of God. In 12:2 Jesus' career of faith is represented as exemplary for believers; by preceding in the exercise of an ideal faith He enables others to follow in the same αγων of faith. Hebrews 5:9 proves that where the author does not wish to emphasize this peculiar idea of precession, but merely to express the causal relationship between His work and the salvation of believers, he uses the general term αιτιος: "He became author of eternal salvation." The reference to the Resurrection in both Petrine passages renders it probable that the word αρχηγος is here used in the same pregnant sense: Jesus is in virtue of the Resurrection a leader of life, one who has Himself attained unto life, and now makes others partakers of the same. As the murderer in Acts 3:14 inflicts death, so the αρχηγος της ζωης bestows life. σωτηρ, then, is identical with αρχηγος so far as the impartation of life is concerned, but leaves the exemplification of the life-content of the σωτηρια in Jesus' own Person unexpressed. In the speech of St. Paul (13:23) the use of σωτηρ clearly attaches itself to the LXX of the Book of Judges, if the reading ηγειρε of the TR be followed, for this is the verb by which the LXX in Judges 3:9, 15 renders the Hebrew יקח. If, on the other hand, we read with WH ηγαγε, the more immediate reference seems to be to Zechariah 3:8; but even then the word σωτηρ itself points back to the Book of Judges.

3. In St. Paul's writings, apart from the Pastoral Epistles, σωτηρ is found only twice – Ephesians 5:23 and Philippians 3:20. The interpretation of the former passage is much disputed. The husband's relation as head to the wife and Christ's relation as Head to the Church are compared, and in this connection Christ is called σωτηρ του σωματος (of the Church). This last statement seems to imply that Christ's headship over the Church is based on His being the Savior of the Church-body. The question is whether this must be understood in the sense which will likewise be applicable to the relation between husband and wife. In the ordinary sense the husband could hardly be called the savior of the wife's body. But Wagner (*ZNTW* 6 [1905] p. 220) has called attention to a passage in Clement (*Pæd.* 2:5) where it is stated that the Creator provides man with meat and drink του σωζεσθαι χαριν, "for the sake of keeping alive." Applying this to our passage, he obtains the very congruous sense: As the husband is σωτηρ of the wife, by supplying the sustenance of her physical life, so Christ is σωτηρ of the Church, inasmuch as He endows her with eternal life; and for this reason both hold the position of head. This secures for σωζειν the sense of "endowing with eternal life." The peculiarity of the passage, thus understood, would lie in this, that the ordinary religious use of

σωζειν is illustrated by analogy with a natural use of the verb which seems to be without precedent in earlier Biblical Greek. In Philippians 3:20 the word σωτηρ has a specific eschatological reference: Christ is σωτηρ, because at the resurrection He will transform the body of believers into the likeness of His own glorious body. σωζειν therefore here also is equivalent to the bestowal of life.

4. With sudden and remarkable frequency σωτηρ emerges in the Pastoral Epistles (10 times) and in 2 Peter (5 times). In the Pastorals there is further the peculiarity that the name is applied to both God and Christ: to God, in 1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; to Christ, in 2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6. In 2 Peter the reference is always to Christ. In Jude also God is once called “our Savior through Jesus Christ” (v. 25). The designation of God as Savior can appear strange only on the basis of our established custom to reserve this title for Christ; on the basis of the OT it was a perfectly natural usage, for here always God, never the Messiah, is called מוֹשִׁיעַ, σωτηρ. And in the NT itself the act of saving is, where a subject is indicated, as naturally ascribed to God as to Christ (comparatively few passages reflect on the subject). Except perhaps for the one passage, 1 Timothy 4:10, it cannot be said that the meaning of σωτηρ in the Pastorals and 2 Peter differs from its ordinary import, or that of σωζειν in the NT elsewhere. Christ is Savior, because He abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10); as Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ has an eternal Kingdom into which believers receive entrance (2 Peter 1:11). He is called “the great God and Savior,” in so far as believers look for the blessed hope and appearing of His glory (Titus 2:13). The hope of eternal life comes from God our Savior (Titus 1:2; 2:14). Eschatological also is the reference in “the commandment of the Lord and Savior” (2 Peter 3:2). In Titus 2:10 the thought is implied that God is Savior in the ethical sphere, whence “the doctrine of God our Savior” becomes an incentive to holy living. But peculiar is 1 Timothy 4:10 where God is called “the Savior of all men, especially of them that believe.” Wagner proposes to apply here the same sense given to σωτηρ in Ephesians 5:23: God is Savior of all men, inasmuch as He supplies them with natural life; Savior especially of believers, because He supplies these with the higher life of the Spirit (*l.c.* p. 222, where Philo [*de Mundi Opif.* 60: God=εϋεργετης και σωτηρ] is quoted). This might seem to be favored by 1 Timothy 6:13 “God who keepeth all things alive,” or “who giveth life to all things” (cf. the alternative reading ζωογονησει for σωσει in Luke 17:33). But it is less in keeping with Titus 2:11 where a similar universalism of God’s σωζειν is affirmed, and yet this is a matter of redemption, not of nature. Wagner is quite correct, however, in urging against von Soden that “God σωτηρ of all men” cannot mean “God is *willing* to be σωτηρ of all men”; and against B. Weiss, that it cannot mean “God has made salvation objectively possible for all men, while subjectively He realizes it in believers only.” The solution of the difficulty must be sought elsewhere, viz. in connection with the pronounced universalism of the Pastoral Epistles in general. The emphasis and frequency with which this principle is brought forward render it probable that something specific in the historical situation to which the Pastorals address themselves lies at its basis, and at the basis also of the frequency with which the words σωζειν, σωτηρια, σωτηριος, σωτηρ are employed. There is absolutely no reason to suspect the writer of any intention to weaken or neutralize the doctrine of predestination. Besides involving denial of the Pauline origin of the Epistles, this would leave unexplained why, in other passages, the principle of predestination is enunciated with all desirable distinctness. The only plausible view is that the passages under review contain a warning against the dualistic trend of that incipient Gnosticism to whose early presence in the Apostolic period the Epistles of the First Captivity also bear witness. In a twofold sense it might become of importance to vindicate, over against this theory, the universalism of saving grace: on the one hand, in so far as

Gnosticism on principle excluded from salvation those who lacked the pneumatic character; and, on the other hand, in so far as those belonging to the *pneumatici* might be considered to carry the power of salvation by nature in themselves. In other words, it might become necessary to emphasize that God saves all men, not merely one class of men, and that no man is by his subjective condition either sunk beneath the possibility or raised above the need of salvation. Perhaps also the emphasis upon the fact that God as well as Christ is Savior, though perfectly natural from the OT point of view, is specifically directed against a system which tended to separate between the Creator-God of the old dispensation and the Savior-God, Christ, of the new. The recent investigations of Friedländer have shown that there existed long before the 2nd century of our era a Jewish type of Gnosticism, so that it can no longer be asserted that an anti-Gnostic polemic of this type *per se* militates against the Pauline authorship of the Pastoral Epistles.

In recent times attempts have been made to explain the rise and development of the NT conception of σωτηρ and σωτηρια from extra-Biblical sources. Anrich (*Das antike Mysterienwesen in seinem Einfluss auf das Christenthum*, 1894) pointed out how in the cult of the "Mysteries" the promise of σωτηρια, in the sense of immortality, plays a large role. Similarly Wobbermin (*Religionsgeschichtliche Studien*, 1896), who asserts that especially in the cult of the subterranean gods the word σωτηρ was common as a name for the Deity. In two articles published in the *Christliche Welt* for 1899 and 1900, entitled "Als die Zeit erfüllt war" and "Der Heiland," Harnack calls attention to certain inscriptions discovered in Asia Minor, at Priene and Halicarnassus, dating probably from the year B.C. 9, in which the Emperor Augustus is invested with Divine predicates, and called σωτηρ, the one who has been filled for the good of mankind with gifts, a god whose birthday has brought to the world the evangels connected with his person, the Zeus of the fatherland and the σωτηρ of the human race. Harnack assumes that St. Luke in calling Jesus σωτηρ was influenced by these and similar pagan forms of expression current in the cult of the Emperors, and that the same influence may be seen at work in the frequency with which the Pastoral Epistles and 2 Peter employ the title. He further suggests that St. Paul purposely avoided its use, because of the eudemonistic, political flavor it had acquired from these pagan associations. St. Luke, in the "Gospel of the Infancy," the writer of the Pastorals, the writer of 2 Peter, and the Fourth Evangelist, meant to represent Christ as the true σωτηρ in whom lay the reality of what paganism falsely ascribed to its rulers, dead or living. - Soltau (*Die Geburtsgeschichte Jesu Christi*, 1902) reaches the same conclusions, independently of Harnack, on the basis of the same and other classical material, and also asserts derivation of the story of the virgin birth from the same pagan circle of ideas. - Wendland (*ZNTW* 5 [1904], p. 335ff.) investigates the use of σωτηρ in antiquity with reference to both gods and deified men - a usage dating back from before the production of the LXX. Up to the time of Alexander the Great, σωτηρ was not applied to men, because it was still felt to be a cult-name reserved for the gods. The first trace of its application to men appears in Thucydides, where it is given to Brasidas, and in Polybius, where Philip of Macedon is called σωτηρ. After that, the custom became quite common among the Ptolemies and the Seleucids: first the dead, then also the living rulers were honored with this title. It was also combined with the Oriental idea of the incarnation of the godhead, whence such a term as επιφικνης was applied to rulers. A feast celebrated on the day of such a σωτηρ was called σωτηρια. From the Greek dynasties the custom passed over to the representatives of the Roman power, especially to the Emperors. Examples are adduced from Cicero, whose rhetorical exaggerations in speaking of great Romans are believed to have sprung from his knowledge of the Oriental forms of speech. Even a philosopher like Epicurus could be called σωτηρ after a semi-Divine fashion, and that in his lifetime. Finally, in

connection with the recent trend towards explaining Biblical conceptions from Babylonian sources, it has been proposed to find in the NT idea of σωτηρ an embodiment of the Oriental myth of a Savior-King (*Erlöser-König*); cf. A. Jeremias, *Babylonisches im NT* (1905), pp. 27-46.

It is not proposed here to subject the above hypotheses to an exhaustive criticism. To some extent the later forms have effectually criticized the earlier ones. Thus Wendland disposes of much in Anrich, Wobbermin, and Soltau. Wagner (*ZNTW* 6 [1905]) skillfully attacks the position of Wendland. A few remarks must here suffice. The derivation of the whole idea of σωτηρ and σωτηρια from the Oriental expectation of the Savior-King is impossible, because OT prophecy not at all, and Jewish theology very rarely, applies the name מוֹשִׁיעַ, σωτηρ, to the Messiah, and yet in eschatological Messianism it would be natural to look first of all for the evidence of such Oriental importation. As to the alleged connection between the Greek mysteries and Christianity, it should be observed that the cult of the mysteries flourished in the 2nd century of the Christian era, and that none of the authorities quoted by Anrich in support of his view dates further back than this. The Asian inscriptions, of which Harnack and Soltau make so much, offer at the best some striking analogies to the NT mode of representation; but a real literary dependence cannot be made out, as even Wendland admits. In his second article, "Der Heiland," Harnack expresses himself much more guardedly than in the first, after this fashion: "On the Jewish and on the Grecian line numerous religious conceptions existed, which covered each other and so simply could pass over into each other." σωτηρ in the cult of the Emperors has quite a different sense from what it has in the NT; in Hellenism it never means "the one who translates from death into life." It is also exceedingly doubtful whether St. Paul consciously and purposely avoids the use of σωτηρ with reference to Christ, because of its pagan, idolatrous associations. Why did not St. Paul avoid κυριος for the same reasons? Why not σωζειν and σωτηρια themselves as well as σωτηρ? A far more simple explanation is that the non-use of מוֹשִׁיעַ in the OT with reference to the Messiah continued to exert its influence in the usage of St. Paul. An allusion to the Emperor-cult and the role played in it by σωτηρ in Philippians 3:20 is not impossible, for in the words "our πολιτευμα is in heaven" the pronoun is emphatic. Where, apart from St. Paul, the conception of σωζειν is first joined to the Person of Christ, this is done in dependence on the Hebrew meaning of the name "Jesus," i.e. in dependence on the OT (Matthew 1:21). *A priori* there would be no objection to the hypothesis that in Luke and the Pastoral Epistles and 2 Peter and the Fourth Gospel there is a conscious appropriation of, and at the same time a protest against, the pagan use of the word, and that the sudden frequency of its occurrence in the Pastorals and 2 Peter is to be explained from this. As a matter of fact, however, this involves, according to Harnack, the unhistorical character of at least the present form of the *Magnificat* and of the message of the angels to the shepherds (Luke 1:47 and 2:11); further, the unhistorical character of at least the present form of the speeches of St. Peter and St. Paul (Acts 5:31; 13:23); and, finally, the unhistorical character of at least the form of the discourse of our Lord in John 4:42. It has been shown above, that the Lukan record can be readily explained from the historical situation which it reports. For John 4:42 (and 1 John 4:14) σωτηρ του κοσμου, a comparison with 4 Ezr. 13:26, where the same phrase occurs, proves that even here we do not necessarily move in Greek trains of thought, but are still in the Jewish sphere. All that remains of Wendland's contention is, that possibly in the Pastoral Epistles there is some adjustment in the use of σωτηρ to the manner of its handling in pagan quarters, for an apologetic purpose. But even here considerable weeding of the Wendland's assertions will be necessary. Thus he brings the χαρις, which is named as the motive of the Divine act of σωζειν, into connection with the *benignitas* and *elementia* of the Roman emperors. But Ephesians 2:5-9 shows

how all this can be readily explained without resorting to such far-fetched analogies. Similarly the *προ χρονων αιωνιων* of Titus 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:9 is treated by Wendland as an allusion to the eternity of the Roman Emperors, which takes no account of the fact that the latter was a eternity of post- not of pre-existence. In Titus 3:7, where he would find the same analogy, the eternity is not that of the σωτηρ, but of believers. Most, perhaps, could be said in favor of the Hellenistic association of such terms as *επιφανεια*, *μεγας θεος*, and *φιλανθρωπια* in their joint use with σωτηρ (cf. Wagner, p. 232). But, taken as a whole, σωτηρ is shown to be a thoroughly OT conception by its dependence on σωζειν and σωτηρια, about whose OT provenience there can be no reasonable doubt.