

Salvation: Prosperity or Poverty. An Assessment of African Pentecostal Christianity.

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Abstract

The doctrine of salvation has wrongly been construed by many African Pentecostal adherents. The problem, in particular, emanates from a misunderstanding of the doctrine of salvation as presented in the Bible. The crux of the problem lies with two critical terms: prosperity and poverty. This has elicited an endless debate among scholars, theologians, and Christians in general. At first, the debate gained its popularity in the wake of the prosperity gospel which started in America in the late nineteenth century. One school of thought overemphasizes prosperity as a sure mark of true salvation while another school emphasizes poverty as the mark of salvation. Today, the reality of this debate plays out in everyday life in African Pentecostal Christianity. It has left sincere adherents confused and unable to grasp what salvation means in reality. While the two emphases are representative of certain aspects of salvation the extremes must be avoided in discussing the doctrine of salvation. This study is an assessment of the doctrine of salvation in African Pentecostalism. It explores the two sides of emphasis of the doctrine of salvation that has dominated African Pentecostalism; prosperity or poverty. By so doing, the study seeks to respond to the fundamental question: Is salvation representative of prosperity or poverty or both? The study responds to the question by assessing selected passages Scripture on salvation. The study will analyze those passages for their correct interpretation and application. It is hoped that in so doing the impasse which exists in discussing salvation on the narrow sense of prosperity and poverty will be resolved. Thus, the study is exegetical, biblical, and theological

Keywords: African Christianity, African Pentecostalism, poverty, prosperity Pentecostalism, salvation, wealth and health.

Introduction

There remains a challenge in the presentation of the doctrine of salvation within the corridors of African Pentecostal Christianity. The major impediment to understanding the doctrine of salvation lies with two terms, that is, prosperity and poverty. One group, mainly, Pentecostalism emphasizes prosperity as a key characteristic of salvation, while

another group views salvation purely of the poor, hence poverty as the key precursor. Sanders, for instance, gives a distinctive characteristic of what she terms as the ‘sanctified church’. She defines the sanctified church as “a revitalizing phenomenon that had arisen among various groups of ‘saints’ in America. It is not a new religion and ‘is in fact, the older forms of Negro religious expression asserting themselves against the new.’”¹ A question that quickly arises from Sanders analysis is: Against what does this church assert herself of to the new? Sanders clarifies this aspect and explains that it is “a protest against the high-brow tendency in Negro Protestant congregations as the Negroes gain more education and wealth.”² In other words, this new movement seeks to emphasize more on the spiritual matters of church life at the expense of physical and socio-economic needs. This understanding stands in juxtaposition to those who emphasize on “wealth and health” of the gospel.

On the other side, the prosperity ministries as noted by Lindhardt emphasize material abundance and their rhetoric of victory, achievement, and success and thus offer a version of Christianity that is more focused on the here-and-now”³ This has created a huge lacuna between holiness and prosperity churches. Lindhardt observes that perhaps a more relevant distinction to make in contemporary Africa is between those (mostly urban) congregations that mainly focus on prosperity and the healing-focused churches of the poorer rural and urban areas.⁴

This study seeks to adjudicate between these two concepts and demonstrate their relationship with the doctrine of salvation. It also proposes the need for a balanced approach to understanding the doctrine of salvation. The study undertakes an analytical approach by engaging sound biblical exegesis to present the doctrine of salvation. This involves an analysis of some Bible passages critical to the understanding of the doctrine of salvation. The study focuses on three major sections. The first section involves a lexical study of the term salvation. This will include the meaning of the concept of salvation in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. The second section concentrates on the problematic texts when it comes to understanding salvation. The purpose of this is to address the thorny issues surrounding the doctrine of salvation. The third section is a presentation of the correct understanding of the doctrine of salvation for its proper epistemological and pragmatical considerations by the church in Africa.

¹ Cheryl J. Sanders, *Saints in Exile: The Holiness-Pentecostal Experience in African American Religion and Culture* (New York, United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1999), 3, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1591272>.

² Sanders, 3.

³ Martin Lindhardt, *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies* (Leiden, Netherlands, The: Brill, 2014), 9, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1823630>.

⁴ Lindhardt, 9.

Clarifying of Terms

Before we delve into the terminology of salvation, it is vital to clarify some of the terms employed in this study. The term Pentecostalism and its sister term charismatic remain unclear. This has seen a revitalized interest in studying them, a situation that has seen a resurgence of numerous proliferations in the recent decades. However, the studies have only afforded to make it more complex rather than simplifying them for both a scholar and a layperson. Some scholars think that we should talk of pentecostals but not pentecostalism. For instance, Anderson and others argue, “It is probably more correct to speak of pentecostals in the contemporary global context, though the singular form will continue to be used to describe these movements”.⁵ To correctly define pentecostalism Anderson asserts, “If we are to do justice to this global movement, we must include its more recent expressions in the independent, Charismatic and neo-Charismatic movements.”⁶ In considering the definitions so far discussed, it is evident that the terms pentecostalism and charismatic involve many aspects in describing Christianity that manifests themselves differently from conservative Christianity.

Generally speaking, the term Pentecostalism is a movement of Christianity that emphasizes the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the same. Coleman rightly notes, “tongues were, therefore, an important indication of the reception of grace but also a form of subsequent empowerment”.⁷ In this study, we shall use the term pentecostalism in the singular not to exclude any other shades of the movement but as well to include all the rest. In addition, Pentecostalism is used also synonymously to charismatic.

African Pentecostalism is characterized by many aspects. Brown observes that several essays depict African worldviews in which disease and poverty are both understood as the work of Satan and his demonic host, while health and finances are envisioned as material blessings from God that tangibly express full salvation.⁸ On this basis, African Pentecostalism emphasizes material prosperity as one of its key tenets. The

⁵ Allan Anderson et al., *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods* (Berkeley, United States: University of California Press, 2010), 15, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=570667>.

⁶ Anderson et al., 16.

⁷ Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity: Spreading the Gospel of Prosperity* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 21, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=143911>.

⁸ Candy Gunther Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Cary, United States: Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2011), 17, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3053985>.

fact that African Pentecostalism is characterized by the gospel of health and wealth cannot be denied. This is seen in the kind of sermons preached in many churches by many television evangelists and preachers. It has become the standard way of preaching in today's churches in Africa.

The second aspect of African pentecostalism is cited by Gifford, quoted by Brown who understands the defining characteristic of African Pentecostalism to be a vision of "victorious" living that encompasses health while being even more concerned with the financial blessing needed for a successful life in the present world.⁹ This is another aspect that is emphasized in many Pentecostal churches in Africa. The Christian life is portrayed as that of a victor and winner in every circumstance in every sense, physical, economic, and spiritual. In this case, sicknesses are unnecessary intruders who must be fought with all ferocity mainly through prayer. The same applies to both economic and spiritual stability.¹⁰

The interest of this study is on what is the Movement today commonly termed as neo-pentecostal charismatic Movement. Coleman argues that the Movement is known variously as "the Faith, Faith Fomular, Prosperity, Health and Wealth, or Word Movement".¹¹ Further, he identifies three areas of teaching characteristic of the Movement, that is, its distinct theological profile: Faith, prosperity, and 'positive confession'.¹²

Scholarly Concepts of the Doctrine of Salvation

The doctrine of salvation has continued to occupy a center stage of discussion in the scholarly world in recent times. A brief survey of different views held by scholars is hereby a necessary undertaking. For instance, John Hick, cited by Asamoah-Gyadu, uses the hybrid term salvation/liberation about 'the transformation of our human situation from a state of alienation from the true structure of reality to a radically better state in harmony with reality.'¹³ This concept is an interesting one to note. The key denominator here is a transformation of the human situation. As it will be revealed rather, the aspect of transformation remains critical in the discussion of the effects of salvation. In other words, the impact of salvation on an individual is accompanied by a clear manifestation of a changed lifestyle. However, the exact elements of transformation are missing from Asamoah-Gyadu's consideration. Asamoah-Gyadu further notes that "in Charismatic

⁹ Brown, 17,18.

¹⁰ The emphasis is drawn from 3 John 2, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers".

¹¹ Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity*, 27.

¹² Coleman, 28.

¹³ J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden, Netherlands, The: Brill, 2004), 133, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=280454>.

ministries (CMs) salvation is something to be experienced. The key ‘soteriological goals’ therefore include the realization of ‘transformation and empowerment, ‘healing and deliverance,’ and prosperity and success in the lives of believers”.¹⁴ The proposition set out by scholars such as Asamoah-Gyadu is a representative of the view that salvation is inclined toward prosperity. With this understanding, salvation is a means to eradicate poverty and bring meaningful transformation. The question that arises is as to whether salvation is meant to solve all of the human problems; political, socio-economic, and spiritual in the here and now. If so to what extent, wholly or partially? These and many more questions usually arise in discussing soteriological matters. Even Jesus’ disciples were concerned about material benefits in following him at one point.¹⁵

Another model suggested by proponents of prosperity is the holistic frame. According to Barnes “a holistic frame attempts to consider the many dynamics believed to perpetuate poverty. Most importantly, it stems from the spiritual premise that after salvation, godly living can result in economic as well as non-economic benefits”.¹⁶ This model is quite prevalent in many black megachurches. While it is true that certain benefits accompany salvation, the issue of attaching prosperity with salvation in a rigid manner does not fully present the biblical position of the doctrine of salvation. The model condemns poverty to the core and argues that poverty distortion God’s image in man. In addition, poverty is viewed as the problem of one’s mindset which must undergo a paradigm shift. Such transformation of the mind can only happen after one receives salvation.¹⁷ It is simplistic to argue that salvation is an escape from poverty.

The Concept of Salvation in the Old Testament Canon

Talking of salvation in the Old Testament (OT) may sound theologically inconsistent since God’s people, Israel specifically belonged to God. How would they be then in need of salvation? This notwithstanding, the nation of Israel kept shifting goalposts as far as their relationship with God was concerned. The book of Judges, in particular, brings to light Israel’s unfaithfulness and the many times God relegated them to the hands of the enemy because of apostasy. So from time to time, they needed God’s salvation. Salvation was only to be enjoyed as long as they remained within covenantal parameters. For instance, Deuteronomy 28 extrapolates the grounds on which the nation of Israel would experience the benefits of salvation and the consequence of breaching the covenant.

¹⁴ Asamoah-Gyadu, 133.

¹⁵ See Matt 19:27

¹⁶ Sandra L. Barnes, *Live Long and Prosper: How Black Megachurches Address HIV/AIDS and Poverty in the Age of Prosperity Theology* (New York, United States: Fordham University Press, 2012), 149, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3239766>.

¹⁷ Barnes, 148.

Lopez has noted that the word salvation is from the verbal stem ‘save’ *yāša*. It originally meant “to be roomy, broad,” which is the opposite of the concepts of “oppression,” or “narrowness.”¹⁸ In this sense, salvation means deliverance from oppression due to captivity or imprisonment. On many occasions, the nation of Israel fell into the hands of her enemies due to her infidelity and breach of the covenant with God. Psalm 107 recounts salvation history pointing out the numerous instances the nation of Israel would cry out to God for salvation.

In the *New Bible Dictionary*, the basic meaning is to “bring into a spacious environment” (cf. ps 18:36; 66:12), but it carries from the beginning the metaphorical sense of ‘freedom from limitation’ and the means to that; i.e. deliverance from factors which constrain and confine. It can be referred to as deliverance from disease (Is 38:20; cf. v. 9), from trouble (Jer 30:7), or enemies (2 Sa. 3:3:18; Ps 44:7).¹⁹

The Hebrew word translated salvation is *יְשׁוּעָה* (*yeshuah*). According to Strong’s concordance, the term *יְשׁוּעָה* means deliverance, rescue, salvation, safety, and welfare. From this derivative, deductively speaking, the term has a broader sense of meaning. The broad sense of the term salvation is also attested in many lexical tools. For instance, Alexander and Rosner, argue that in biblical usage, salvation is a comprehensive term denoting all benefits, physical or spiritual, that are graciously bestowed on humans by God.²⁰ From the lexical meaning, it is clear that salvation is holistic. Any attempts to take one aspect of the term over against the other is likely to create a logical quagmire to an understanding of the term’s usage. Usually, when a word such as salvation presents a range of meanings, then it is logical to explain it within the context of its usage. Consequently, the term salvation does not mean all the above range of meanings in every context it occurs. It will be helpful to consider the contexts to which we apply the term to avoid misuse. An example will suffice. For demonstration purposes, I have selected a passage of the Old Testament for our consideration.

For instance, the term salvation first occurs in Genesis 49:18. It reads

יח ליִשׁוּעָה קוֹיְתִי יְהוָה

In translation, this would read, “I have waited for your salvation, Yahweh.” A logical question to ask is what the word salvation means in this context. Ignoring the context will be detrimental.

¹⁸ René A Lopez, “Old Testament Salvation— From What?,” 2003, 50.

¹⁹ D. R. W. Wood and I. Howard Marshall, eds., *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996).

²⁰ T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, IVP Reference Collection (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000).

First of all the words were spoken by Jacob while in Egypt. The opening verse of the chapter indicates that the pronouncement was futuristic prophetic. It reads, “ And Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Gather together, *that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days*” (Gen 49:1, NKJV. Italics mine). The patriarch might probably have anticipated the salvation of the Israelites from the foreign country. As the biblical narrative unfolds, this culminated in the deliverance of the Israelites from the hand of Pharaoh the king of Egypt. The kind of deliverance here was emancipation from the oppression inflicted on the Israelites by the king of Egypt. The immediate context of the verse also shows that the salvation anticipated by the patriarch was from danger. After describing the dangerous characteristic of Dan as a ‘serpent on the way’, Jacob then makes the pronouncement that “ I have waited for your salvation”. Therefore, salvation in this context is deliverance from danger or harm of some kind.

In many instances, in the Old Testament, this is the sense in which the term is used. This could be from an enemy, disease, or danger that has already been discussed. It is no doubt that the biblical sense of Salvation was holistic. The idea of salvation as of holistic nature can be summed up in the Hebrew term *šālôm* (peace) that refers to personal wholeness and well-being in every sphere.

In many of the references to salvation, God is its author. For instance, one of the climactic acts of God’s deliverance of His people was the exodus event. Moses understood this very well when he told the Israelites, “ Stand firm and see the salvation of the Lord “ (Exod 14:13). Therefore, God is the savior of humankind. Wood and Marshall affirm this fact when they say “the words ‘God’ and ‘saviour’ are virtually identical terms in the OT”.²¹

In the OT, God could use various means (personal or impersonal) to achieve salvation for His people. For instance, with the case of the Israelites in their wilderness journeys, God used the pillar of cloud and the wind at the Red Sea (Exodus 14:19-21) (). On other several occasions, God would use some personalities such as Gideon (Judg. 6-8) and Esther (Est. 4-7). Despite the means God chooses to use, at the end of it all, it is God and God alone who brings Salvation. He declares in Isaiah that “I, even, I, am the Lord, and apart from me there is no savior” (Isa 43:11).

The exodus event played a major part in Israel’s salvation history. It became the pivotal component of the covenant relationship between Israel and God. The event served as the preamble to the covenant: “ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (Exod 20:2; Deut. 5:6; cf. Exod 29:46; Lev. 26:13). For the Israelites to continue enjoying this special relationship they when meant to take seriously the terms of the covenant as stipulated in Deuteronomy 28. There the Lord

²¹ Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*.

outlined for the nation of Israel blessings based on their obedience and curse if they fail to keep the terms of the covenant. At this point, we now turn to consider the usage of the term salvation in the New Testament (NT).

The Concepts of Salvation in the New Testament (NT).

The Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *yēša* is *sōtēria*. The Greek noun *sōtēria* is a derivative from the Greek verb *sōzō* (save). It is also from the Greek verb *sōzō* we get *sōtēr* (“savior”); *sōtērios* (‘bringing salvation’); and compound verbs *anasōzō* (‘rescue’) and *diasōzō* (‘preserve’)²². From this analysis, it is evident that the NT usage of the term salvation is consistent with the OT usage. However, it is noteworthy to realize the emphasis given in the NT usage. Wood and Marshall argue that “‘the religious’ usage of a moral/spiritual deliverance becomes almost wholly dominant as far as the idea of salvation is concerned. Non-religious usage is virtually confined to saving from acute danger to life (Acts 27:20, 31; Mk. 15:30; Heb. 5:7).”²³

In the synoptic gospels, for instance, Jesus announces His mission of bringing salvation to the lost (Lk 19:9). It is important to understand the kind of salvation Jesus announces to Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is said to have been a tax collector. In the first century AD World, tax collectors were detested because of using force and extorting people during tax collection. Zacchaeus himself confesses the likelihood of stealing from the people; “Then Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, ‘Lord, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and *if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold,*” (Lk 19:8, italicized mine). The salvation Jesus announces to Zacchaeus was that of imparting pardon. In other words, salvation is associated with the forgiveness of sins. We shall return to this text during our textual analysis. For now, it suffices to say that salvation that Jesus brought entails forgiveness of sins. This does not imply that the other forms of usage of the word salvation as we have so far seen in both of the Testaments of the Bible are not applicable. The primary emphasis of the word and in its strict sense, especially in, the New Testament, salvation is that of forgiveness of sins. Van der Watt argues, “The focal point in Matthew’s history of salvation is illustrated by the episodes where the words *αφεσις* (forgiveness) and *σωζω* (I save) occur. Absolution supposes forgiveness”²⁴. The term *αφιημι* (I forgive) has a wider meaning not just simply forgiveness. Van der Watts further indicates, “In the New Testament the term *αφιημι* is used to refer to the remission of monetary debt (Matt 18:27, 32), to being freed from

²² Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 762.

²³ Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 1047.

²⁴ Jan G. van der Watt, *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology* (Leiden, Netherlands, The: Brill, 2005), 15, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=280748>.

captivity (Lk 14:18), and to absolution from sin (Matt 6:14-15; Mk 2:5-10; 3:28; Lk 7:47-50) ²⁵.

Besides, salvation involves a change of conduct. It has been argued that “salvation calls for a contrite heart, childlike, receptive helplessness, and the renunciation of all for Christ – conditions it is impossible for man unaided to fulfill”.²⁶ Salvation is a life of total surrender to Christ and total dependence on Him.

Textual Analysis

We now turn to a textual analysis of selected passages of scripture to shed light on the sense of the term salvation. This section follows sound biblical exegesis to avoid committing similar historical hermeneutical errors of our predecessors. By following careful biblical exegesis it is expected to bring in return the proper perspective of the term salvation in contemporary biblical hermeneutical and application. This will put under check the misinterpretation and misapplication of the concept of salvation. For this to be achieved a select analysis of passages both from the OT and the NT are considered. This is especially important to bring a balance.

Salvation as Spiritual Restoration: Analysis of Psalm 51

Numerous occurrences of the word ‘salvation’ are found in the book of Psalms. It is not practical to analyze all the sections in which it occurs. For purposes of this study, we restrict ourselves to Psalm 51. The context of Psalm 51 is that David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, Uriah’s wife (1 Sam 11). David is one individual in the OT who enjoyed a close fellowship with God. The Bible calls David “a man after God’s heart” (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). The first reference of the phrase is used by Samuel the prophet when he went to anoint David king over Israel. The Prophet Samuel used the phrase to describe the man who will replace king Saul in office. The replacement of king Saul was occasioned by king Saul’s act of assuming the office of a priest and decided to offer a sacrifice instead of waiting for the prophet Samuel. From that time, as indicated in 1 Samuel 13:14 by the use of an adverb of time ‘attâ (now) God rejected king Saul and sought out for himself a man after his own heart. Auld explains, “The basic sense of ‘attâ is temporal, “now” or “at this time”. But it is often used rhetorically, and even logical, as “now” and then” are in English, to introduce the main point of an argument”²⁷. This is to say that king Saul never cared for his relationship with God but David did.

²⁵ van der Watt, 15.

²⁶ Wood and Marshall, *New Bible Dictionary*, 1047.

²⁷ A. Graeme Auld, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary* (Louisville, United States: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 142, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3416799>.

God's choice of David does not imply that David was perfect. Indeed, David's life was full of flaws, he was quick to repent and seek God's forgiveness. In the current chapter (Psalm 51), David upon realizing his mistake sought God's forgiveness. David knew what it meant to lose fellowship with God. It was equivalent to losing his salvation. Verse 12a reads, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation." What was at stake here is David's likelihood of losing the joy of salvation. The verb "restore" is in the hiphil imperfect, third-person feminine singular. The hiphil stem is generally used to express causative action in the active voice. In this case, salvation is an act of God and not man. Indeed, salvation belongs to God as the Psalmist indicates in Psalm 3:8. Salvation here was all to do with the restoration of a relationship that was on the verge of breaking up. Sin threatens our fellowship with God. David felt the desperation in his spirit that he never had before and pleaded with God to restore the joy of salvation.

True salvation brings about joy. Joy is a characteristic of salvation attested in many passages in the Bible (Ps 95:1-2; Luke 2:10-11; 15:7; Gal 5:22-23). In the last passage, it is intriguing to note that joy is the fruit of the holy spirit. This is what David sought to be restored in his life. In response to the prosperity gospel, it is simplistic to emphasize material wellbeing at the expense of the spiritual. What David desperately wanted was a restored relationship with God, not even his kingdom which might be given to another just as was the case with king Saul. It is only after mending his broken relationship with God that David turned to seek deliverance from his enemies (v. 14).

It is theologically correct to argue that salvation is about outward wellbeing. While as we have seen salvation is a broader term covering many aspects of life (physical and spiritual), the emphasis, however, is on the spirit which manifests in the physical. It, therefore, to keep this balance to avoid creating a theological chasm. This understanding is consistent with biblical theology throughout the Bible. Indeed David does emphasize the spiritual aspect of salvation when he says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a steadfast spirit within me" (v. 10). David here asks God to do what he alone can do, *bara* (בָּרָא, imperfect of בָּרָא, to create). It is interesting to note the choice of the verb here. Why the verb "create" and not *asah* (עָשָׂה, to make, or do).

The verb בָּרָא (to create) has always been associated with creating out of nothing, *ex nihilo* [Latin for "out of nothing"]. While this is the primary sense of which the verb "create" used, but sometimes the two verbs "to create" or to "make" are used interchangeably in Genesis. For instance, we are told God created the first male and female humans (Gen. 5:2). But we know from Genesis 2:7 that God formed יָצָה Adam from the dust of the earth and in Genesis 2:22 we are told that God fashioned כְּנָה Eve from the rib of Adam.

The kind of creation David sought has been explained alternatively by scholars. Strickman and Ibn argue, "Being that David earlier said that he was brought forth in

iniquity (v. 7), that is, that the lust which is implanted in human heart brought him to sin, he now prayed to God and asked him to help him overcome the impulse, so that he would not commit a similar sin again”.²⁸

Given all this, we can conclude that the intention of the verb to “create” was intended to communicate empowerment and transformation at the same time. Empowerment in the sense that David needed supernatural enabling to overcome sin while at the same time a transformation of his heart. This way David would continue enjoying his fellowship with God and live a victorious life.

Salvation as Deliverance From a Physical Danger

The exodus event perhaps stands as one major salvific event in the history of the Israelites accomplished by God. The aspect of salvation being emphasized is deliverance from oppression by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. The Israelites were under bondage in Egypt for about 430 years. The suffering they underwent is recounted in Exodus 1. God responded by sending Moses to deliver them from their slavery and oppression (Exd 3). Moses, of course, typifies Jesus Christ, the Messiah, that is, Israel’s savior in many ways. Deuteronomy 18:15 foretells of Jesus as a prophet like Moses. Indeed, in many ways, there are numerous points of convergence between the two. Both of the two are associated with the word of God. Moses is portrayed as the law given while Jesus is presented as the law interpreter (Matt 5). In his Monograph, Dharamraj asserts, “while Moses remains a prophet without equal, hope that the prophetic line would yield another Moses’ fibre rests on the Lord’s promise through Moses, made in response to Israel’s request for a mediation of the divine word to the people (Deut. 18:15–22)”.²⁹

The fact that Moses was particularly involved in the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt parallels him to Jesus, the savior of Israel (Matt. 1:21; Lk 2:10–12). The two figures Moses and Jesus represent different aspects of salvation. Moses’ is mainly and primarily to bring deliverance in the physical sense with the spiritual implication (Exod. 20:2–3). The exodus event served as a preamble to the covenant (Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). The Israelites were to respond in gratitude to God’s act of deliverance and remain loyal to him. The benefits of salvation so to say were to be enjoyed as long as the Israelites would remain faithful to God (Deut. 28).

The idea of understanding salvation as deliverance from a physical danger that is, from enemies, sickness among others is attested in many OT passages as well. For instance, David composed and sung many psalms depicting this aspect of salvation. In

²⁸ H. Norman Strickman and Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Commentary: On the Second Book of Psalms* (Boston, MA, United States: Academic Studies Press, 2009), 63, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3110404>.

²⁹ Havilah Dharamraj, *Prophet Like Moses: A Narrative-Theological of the Elijah Cycle* (Milton Keynes, United Kingdom: Authentic Media, 2011), 1, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3116675>.

Psalm 18, for instance, David praises Yahweh for delivering him from his enemies. David in his life's time encountered many enemies including king Saul who sought after his life. In all these instances, David experienced God's deliverance from his enemies. David calls God his salvation.³⁰ The acts of God's deliverance of his people was intended to foster covenantal relationship.

NT Passage Analysis

The emphasis on salvation in the New Testament touches both on the realms of the spirit and the physical. The dawn of salvation is connected to the coming of Jesus Christ. In Matthew, argues Van der Watts, "Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, has a particular connotation because 'God's salvation is attached to the name Jesus'".³¹ The four canonical gospels indicate that the primary purpose of Jesus' coming was to save his people Israel and the Gentiles from their sins (Mat 1:23; Mk 1:15; Lk 19:10; 1:29). The concept of salvation holistically is emphasized by the gospel writers. Luke 4:18–19 elaborates on Jesus' mission on earth. Jesus besides coming to preach the good news of the gospel also came to liberate people holistically. The use of infinitives in the two verses points out Jesus' purpose in coming to the world. The first infinitive is *εὐαγγελίσασθαι* (to preach the gospel). The gospel here is directed to the poor. This raises a question as to whether the gospel is for the poor. There is a need to investigate who Luke had in mind. Carroll argues, "The poor include those who are held captive, the blind and those who are oppressed (an illustrative list, not comprehensive), and the good news concerns their liberation and restorative of sight".³² This brings out the aspect of the gospel as holistic. Further, Carroll asserts that the gospel Jesus proclaimed points to "an era of salvation in which social, economic, and cultic dimensions of the communal life will all be radically be reshaped".³³ Therefore, the poor here refers to "the afflicted and the oppressed but not those who believe they do not need repentance".³⁴ It is also important to note that Luke uses the accusative noun *ἄφεσιν*, (an inflection of *ἄφεσις*, release) to demonstrate the intended purpose of Jesus' ministry. Carroll makes an elaborate observation of the usage:

Elsewhere, Luke often uses *aphesis* with the meaning of 'forgiveness,' indicating a release from sin (e.g. 1:77; 3:2; 24:47). In the ensuing narrative, however, the realities of sin (requiring 'release' in the sense of gracious forgiveness),

³⁰ See psalm 18:2.

³¹ Jan G. van der Watt, *Salvation in the New Testament: Perspectives on Soteriology* (Leiden, Netherlands, The: Brill, 2005), 11, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=280748>.

³² John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary* (Louisville, United States: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), 112, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3416788>.

³³ Carroll, 112.

³⁴ Beth Kreitzer, *Luke* (Downers Grove, United States: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 99, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=2030860>.

indebtedness (requiring ‘release’ in the sense of debt relief), and oppression by demonic powers (requiring ‘release’ in the sense of liberation) overlap.³⁵

In considering Carroll’s statement, it is clear that Jesus’ ministry was intended to bring total liberation to people. It is important to maintain this kind of understanding of salvation as well. While this is the case, it should be noted that just like the kingdom of God which is expressed in two senses “the already” and “not yet”, ultimate salvation is eschatological as well. This is where the prosperity gospel gets it wrong when they argue that total salvation is here and now. If this were to be the case, then the kingdom of God would have been established long when Jesus came to announce the gospel. All that Jesus did was to inaugurate the kingdom of God which would as “a mustard seed” grow steadily till its culmination at his second advent.

Pauline Soteriology

Paul’s soteriology emphasizes the transformation of the life of a believer. The common phrases apostle Paul uses to describe salvation include “new creation”, “passing from death to life” and “new birth”. For instance, apostle Paul in drawing from Sarah Hagar allegory in Galatians 4:29 clarifies the difference between the two sons of these two women, that is, the one born, κατὰ πνεῦμα (according to the spirit, Isaac) and the one born κατὰ σάρκα (according to the flesh, Ishmael). Hubbard in his monograph *The New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought*, rightly argues, “He (Paul) reads his perception of Christian experience into the Genesis narrative and defines it as new birth by the spirit”.³⁶ According to Hubbard’s statement, Paul’s thought is that salvation is a matter of experiencing the new birth. It is not an imaginary occurrence in the life of a believer but one that can be experienced. Postle Paul’s sweeping understanding of salvation undergoes a threefold process: Indefication with the cross of Christ, empowerment, and transformation. Hubbards has done an excellent job in analyzing these three categories. He argues, “Rom. 6:1–11 stresses ritual suffering (death, burial, and crucifixion with Christ), empowerment (“so that we might walk in newness of life,” v. 4) and transformation (“alive to God,” v.11).³⁷

For purposes of this study, an analysis of 2 corinthians 5:16–17 would be critical. Matera asserts that “These verses draw out the consequence of Paul’s statement in verses 14–15 that Christ died for all, and all died with him”.³⁸ Paul’s understanding is that the consequence of Christ’s death has led to a radical transformation of a believer’s life (2 Cor. 5:17). Paul writes that he no longer views anyone from a merely human point of view, and if someone is in Christ, that person is a new creation.³⁹ This fact is especially important, especially, in consideration of the view of many prosperity gospel preachers who emphasize material acquisition as a mark of salvation. This would be a

³⁵ Carroll, *Luke*, 111.

³⁶ Moyer V. Hubbard, *New Creation in Paul’s Letters and Thought* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 87, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=202195>.

³⁷ Hubbard, 103.

³⁸ Frank J. Matera, *II Corinthians: A Commentary* (Louisville, United States: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2013), 135, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3416774>.

³⁹ Matera, 135.

merely human view and it would not lead to a proper understanding of the doctrine of salvation. Both verses begin with a conjunction *ὥστε*, (“so”). This means that the ideas of verses 16 and 17 are drawn from the previous verses 14 and 15. The idea of verses 14 and 15 is that Christ’s love was manifested in his saving death for all ⁴⁰. Consequently, Christ’s love controls and directs Paul’s convictions but not the human views as before. Even though verse 16 expresses the fact in the negative while verse 17 is positive, they both testify to the same truth, that is, Christ’s death has radically altered Paul’s perception of the human person.⁴¹

Verse 17 expresses the effect of Christ’s death in the positive, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation” (v.17a). Paul’s phrase “new creation” here is an import from Isaiah 65:17. Swindoll has elaborated beautifully on the phrase:

Paul applies this imagery to the redeemed believer, indicating the stunning, radical, dramatic transformation that God designed to take place when a believer says, ‘I do’ to Jesus Christ. When Christ invades a life, He performs a miraculous act of re-creation, analogous to the extreme overhaul of creation itself that He will perform at the second coming. He brings into being something new.⁴²

Swindoll’s explanation best explains the reality of salvation. Paul’s thought of salvation is a transformation of the human character. It is a creation of a new nature, the divine nature. This is the emphasis that Paul gives in his letters.

Conclusion

As we have demonstrated throughout this study, the doctrine of salvation has suffered misinterpretation through the ages of Christendom. The debate is usually on the emphasis given to what best describes salvation; prosperity or poverty. Both of the ideas fall short in presenting the full understanding of the doctrine of salvation. We have also argued that the term salvation has a broader sense of meaning. Salvation is holistic involving the physical, spiritual and social dimensions. It is, therefore, important to take into consideration of the three dimensions in presenting the doctrine of salvation.

We conclude that salvation is the transformation of the inner man that affects the other three realms. It should not be understood in the reversal order, that is, from the outside out but the inside out. The majority of prosperity gospel preachers begin with the outside-in paradigm rather than the other way round.

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⁴⁰ Matera, *II Corinthians*, 135.

⁴¹ Matera, 137.

⁴² Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Carol Stream, IL, United States: Tyndale House Publishers, 2017), 366, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pacuniversity-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5395735>.

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