

THE CONDITION OF SALVATION FOR JEWS AND GENTILES IN THIS AGE

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The purpose of this paper is to answer the question, "Exactly what must one do to be saved?" According to the Scriptures, what is it that a person must do to be saved?

The key point as emphasized by the *Brit Chadashah* is that faith is the one and only condition for salvation. In more than 200 cases where a condition is given for salvation, faith or belief is stated to be the only condition.

One example is John 1:12: *but as many received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name.* This verse states that the ones who become the children of God are those who *received him*. What does it mean to receive the Messiah? The second part of the verse explains that to receive the Messiah means to *believe on His name*, to believe he really is the Jewish Messiah. Simply by believing what one must believe, one receives salvation. That is the way one becomes a child of God, and believing is the only condition mentioned here.

Another example is Acts 16:30-31: *and brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your house.* In verse 30 the question is asked: *what must I do to be saved?* The Apostle answers in verse 31, the only condition is to *believe on the Lord Jesus*. If they believe on the Lord Yeshua, then they will receive salvation.

Now what exactly must one believe on the Lord Yeshua? Paul spells out the full content of faith in I Corinthians 15:1-4. In verse one he reminds them he had spelled out the gospel to them, and in verse two he reminds them it is by believing the gospel that they are saved. Then in verses three and four he goes on to spell out the full content of the gospel that involves three basic points: first, Messiah died for our sins; secondly, he was buried (the evidence of his death); and, thirdly, he rose again from the dead. So that is the content of the gospel one must believe for salvation, and it applies equally both for Jews and Gentiles.

The Messiah As Substitute

What this shows is that faith must be placed in the Messiah as our substitute for the penalty of our sins and our Savior from the penalty of sin. Salvation is not merely believing that Yeshua existed. Some of the most pagan atheists believe that a man named Yeshua of Nazareth existed. Merely believing that Yeshua existed, and merely believing that he died on the cross, merely believing that he rose again from the dead does not save anyone. Rather a believer's faith must be placed in the Messiah as a substitute for and as a savior from the penalty of sin.

In other words, one needs to trust the Messiah for one's salvation. One must believe that he has accomplished the salvation work on one's behalf. To be saved, one must believe not just that he died, but he died for one's own sins. If one believes that Yeshua the Messiah died for his sins, that presupposes that one has confessed that he is a sinner. If Yeshua died for one's sins, obviously it means that he is a sinner. So one must believe that Yeshua died for their sins as their substitute, was buried and rose again, and therefore, has provided salvation. Thus, one trusts Yeshua for his salvation.

This is the condition of salvation: Faith must be placed in the Messiah as one's substitute for it and as one's Savior from the penalty of sin.

The Greek Words Used

There are three main Greek words, which are used in emphasizing what the condition of salvation is:

1. *Pistis*

The first main Greek word is *pistis*, which is used 243 times in the New Testament. It always has the meaning of "faith," with only four exceptions: Acts 17:31, where it has the meaning of *assurance*; II Thessalonians 2:13, where it is translated as *belief*; Titus 2:10, where it has the meaning of *fidelity*; and Hebrews 10:39, where it is translated *belief*, although some translations have *faith*. Except for these four occasions, the word *pistis* always has the meaning of "faith."

2. *Pisteuo*

The second key Greek word is *pisteuo*, which is used a total of 246 times in the Greek New Testament. It always has the meaning "to believe," except for nine times: once it is translated as *believers* (Acts 5:14); and eight times it is translated as either *commit*, *committed* or *intrusted* (Luke. 16:11; John. 2:24; Rom. 3:2; I Cor. 9:17; Gal. 2:7; I Thess. 2:4; Titus 1:3; I Tim. 1:11).

3. *Peitho*

The third main Greek word is *peitho*, which means, "to cause belief in a thing." This word is used 50 times in the Greek New Testament, and it is translated in nine different ways. It is translated as *persuade* 22 times; as *trust* ten times; as *confidence* nine times; as *obey* seven times; as *believed* three times; as *assure* one time; as *yield* once; as *made free* once; and as *access* once. But in spite of these nine different translations, the root-meaning of the word remains the same: "to cause belief in a thing."

By combining these three Greek words, one can clearly determine what the condition of salvation is in reference to faith. First, it means, “to believe.” Secondly, it means, “to be persuaded of.” Thirdly, it means, “to place confidence in.” And fourthly, it means, “to trust in the sense of relying upon.” These are the four facets of faith when one places his faith in Jesus the Messiah.

The Content Of Faith: Past And Present

There are three facets of salvation that always remain the same.

First, the *basis* of salvation was always Messiah’s death in the sense that from the divine viewpoint, God was always saving people based upon what Messiah either will do or did do. Second, the *means* was always faith; one had to actually believe in order to receive eternal life. Third, the object of faith was always God, as was the case with Abraham who believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness (Genesis 15:6).

But what changes based upon progressive revelation, what God had revealed up to that point of time, is the *content* of faith: What exactly did one have to believe to be saved. That was based upon God’s progressive revelation, how much God had revealed up to that point of time.

So what was the content of faith under the Law? This is spelled out in Isaiah 43:10-12. One had to believe two things for salvation: First, he had to believe that the God of Israel was the only God (and if one believes that it would rule out both polytheism and idolatry); and, second, he had to believe that this God of Israel is the only Savior (and if one believes that it would rule out works as a means of salvation). Thus it was not essential to convert to Mosaic Judaism per se and take the obligations of the Law, though that would give the person the privileges of enjoying the blessings of the Jewish covenants. Thus, the men of Nineveh and others did not need to go so far but they had to believe these two basic points, Israel is responsible to be God’s witnesses (i.e. Jehovah’s witnesses) of these truths.

However, with Messiah’s coming, and with Messiah’s death the content of faith that one must believe now is clearly spelled out in the I Corinthians 15:1-4 passage.

The Jewish Question

Does this apply to Jews today? Especially Orthodox Jews? Can they not obtain salvation by means of the practice of their own Judaism? After all, Jews did not need to believe in Yeshua prior to his coming and were still able by grace through faith to receive salvation, is that now still possible for Jews today? On this issue the New Testament gives a decisive answer, and the answer is no.

A very key verse is Acts 4:12:

And in none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved.

Peter clearly declares to the Sanhedrin that there is no other name given under Heaven by which one could be saved than Yeshua, and therefore, they must put their faith in that person for their salvation. It should be noted that he is speaking to Jews and not Gentiles, and furthermore, he is speaking to Orthodox Jews and not secular Jews. Thus even the most Orthodox Jew who claims to believe in the God of Israel, if he does not also believe in the Messiahship of Yeshua and Messiah's death for his sin, he is just as lost as any pagan Gentile would be. Thus in Acts 2-9, the gospel is consistently declared to those who are Jews or those who are proselytes to Judaism who would certainly affirm their belief in the God of the Hebrew Bible, yet apart from Yeshua they had no salvation.

Is it true that while the Bible affirms that those who believe in Yeshua are clearly saved, but leaves silent the question of those who do not believe? Especially of Jews who do not believe? Here again, the opposite fact is the truth. In John chapter three he does affirm several times that only those who believe have eternal life. Is he silent about those who do not believe? Not at all. Therefore the one who believes not has already been judged because he did not believe on the name of the only begotten Son of God (verse 18). Therefore, the one that fails to believe simply has "the wrath of God abiding on him" (verse 36).

The same truth is taught in many other passages. John the Baptist declared that for those who believe in the one he identifies as the Messiah, they will be baptized by the Spirit; but those who do not believe will be baptized into unquenchable fire.

In John 5, clearly identifying himself both as the Son of God and the Son of Man, Yeshua points out it is those who believe on this Son of God and Son of Man that will undergo the resurrection of life and those who have not done so will undergo the resurrection of judgment (verses 25-29). Furthermore, their failure to recognize him as the Messiah was their failure to believe what Moses actually wrote, because had they truly believed Moses, they would also have recognized who He is and what He teaches is truth (verses 46-47). It should be noted that he is addressing a Jewish audience and not a Gentile audience in this context.

In John 6:40 it is those who believe on the Son that have eternal life and they are the ones that will be resurrected into the immortal and glorified state. This problem simply does not apply to those who do not believe on him.

In John 10, still addressing a Jewish audience, he declares, “I am the door of the sheep”. Those who enter through him are the ones who are saved and those who come in “may have life, may have it abundantly.” But those who do not enter by that door are the ones who do not have this life (verses 7-18).

Luke 10:16 declares that those who reject Yeshua also reject God the Father who sent Yeshua, again that is still strictly a Jewish context.

In John 10:22-39, the Jews who believe in him are the ones who are his sheep and therefore, only they have eternal life and therefore they shall never perish. The promise is simply not applied to that part of the Jewish audience that did not believe on him.

In John 11:26, Yeshua declared that those who believe on him, even though they die physically, they have the promise of the resurrection.

The above examples of course could be multiplied many times over but I chose to limit our discussion within the gospels (even then it is not exhaustive) to keep it within the Jewish context. For example, Paul writes in Galatians 2:21, “...For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died for nothing.” The fact remains, whether one is a Jew or a Gentile, without faith in the person of the Messiah who died for our sins, there is no salvation, there is no eternal life.

Conclusion

If it is possible to be saved in any other way, especially if one provides a way of salvation for Orthodox Jews who do not accept the Messiahship of Yeshua, then we, Messianic Jews, have no special message to give. In a different context Paul writes that if we do not believe in the resurrection, then we are chosen to believe for nothing. The same applies specifically to us as Messianic Jews: Those of us who have chosen to believe in the Messiahship of Yeshua, chosen to be rejected by members of our family, by the Jewish society, especially by Orthodox Jews, then we have believed for nothing. The whole reason for establishing Jewish ministries is that there is only one way of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. This is a message that simply cannot be compromised.