

How do we know when salvation is referring to the nation of Israel or to individual believers? By looking at the content and the context of the verses in which the word "salvation" is used. If some verses are not clear to us, we can simply set them to the side for possible further study, so that we don't get bogged down and fall short of a preliminary impression.

And so we find a basic distinction in the way "salvation" is used in the Bible. "Salvation" means deliverance. Sometimes deliverance refers to Israel as a national body, and sometimes it refers to believers as individuals. And it is deliverance to something as well as from something.

But deliverance from what? It could be deliverance from bondage (such as physical slavery to a master or an oppressor, or spiritual slavery to sin or some sinful behavior). Or it could be deliverance from trouble or affliction, whether physical (such as pain or suffering), or emotional (such as anxieties or fears), or moral (such as a guilty conscience). Or it could be deliverance from condemnation and death.

And deliverance to what? It could be deliverance to God's favor, or to God's lordship, or to righteousness, or to the joy of salvation, or to renewal and sustenance of spiritual life, or to great happiness and blessedness, or to the manifestation of God's glory.

To briefly summarize:

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"Salvation" in the Bible means national or individual deliverance, whether from bondage or affliction or condemnation, and whether to a right relationship to God or to blessedness or to glory

But now we must narrow our focus. Although "salvation" is used in various ways in the Bible, we are primarily concerned with a special sense – that which speaks of our personal relationship to sin and to God. And for this meaning we turn to Paul's letter to the Romans, specifically Romans 1:16-17.