

## **Simply A Matter Of OBSERVATION**

JV Maurer Sr      1.30.24

### **Observation— a simple, yet sure way, to know and prove salvation doctrine**

With so many ideas about how to be saved, it's no wonder people get discouraged from trying to sort through it all. They may throw their hands up and say, "Oh well, everyone seems to have his own interpretation of things. How could I possibly know if my own interpretation is correct? How can I be sure what to believe? Maybe all beliefs are equally valid. Who knows?"

Well, take heart. There is a surprisingly easy way to know. To be sure, much of Scripture is prone to interpretation but correct salvation doctrine can be derived by simple observation— that is, by observing how others were saved in the Christian era. That record is given us in the inspired, roughly thirty-year history of the book of Acts, which contains the hard and fast examples of souls saved— thousands of them! — a whole generation of them! Simply put, people saved in Acts equals sound and correct salvation doctrine. That's true because salvation for one is salvation for all. And all those in the book of Acts were saved by the plan of salvation announced by Peter on the Day of Pentecost, involving repentance, water baptism in Jesus' name, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost (Acts 2:38-39).

### **What about some other verse of Scripture somewhere else?**

Someone may point to verses of Scripture that seem to suggest another way of being saved. By doing so, he may think to get around the book of Acts. But no verse can contradict what actually happened in Acts. In fact, all verses of Scripture regarding Christian salvation must be interpreted in the light of what actually took place. That is the only way they can be interpreted correctly. Nothing can refute what God actually did! God, in His Word, does not deny Himself (2Timothy 2:13). And what God did in saving souls is documented in Acts. That's a theological fact. And so anyone using another verse of Scripture to try to refute the salvation of Acts is misinterpreting that Scripture. God recorded the history of conversions for the very purpose of refuting false salvation claims. This is according to the first rule of interpretation: Scripture interprets Scripture. That is, the examples of conversion exist to illustrate how salvation is to be received and also to shed light on the meaning of other verses of Scripture that may refer to salvation in a summary way.

### **A most curious point of interest**

Christianity covers a lot of area. It has a lot of depth (Ephesians 3:18). There are many aspects to it. It is comprised of many doctrines. And, among all the many

teachers over the last two thousand years, there has been quite a lot of consensus in most areas of teaching. But the one area in which there has been the most disagreement, even to this very day, is that of how to be saved. There are hundreds— some say, thousands— of beliefs and ideas. A person would expect just the opposite. One would think salvation doctrine would be the clearest subject of all in Scripture and the one where there would be the greatest unanimity. Certainly it is the most important subject of all. Nothing else matters without it.

You would expect that people would give the greatest attention to knowing the certainty of what the Bible teaches about the plan of salvation, diligently considering everything the Scriptures reveal in this important area. It seems that a soul sincerely seeking to make Christ's salvation his own, and heaven his eternal home, would leave no stone unturned to be certain he is believing correctly. That study would indeed take in the many Scriptural references to salvation, especially those that seem to prescribe a means for obtaining it. But the greatest area of study should revolve around the many examples of salvation that took place in the book of Acts. That is the only place in the New Testament where you can see salvation received in the Christian era. There is no better way for a person to know he stands in right relation to God than to completely identify with the salvation experience of those recorded in Acts. To lack that shared experience should undermine all confidence of salvation simply because the record in Acts is provided as evidence of it. And, the salvation of Acts is still available for all to receive (Acts 2:39).

### **Here is another interesting thing about the Bible.**

The Bible has shown us redemptive history from the very beginning. Therefore, by observation of redemptive history, we can see how God has saved people from the beginning of time. This will help us understand the importance of biblical examples in our own time.

### **Definition of redemptive history:**

In short, redemptive history is the time the human race has been in need of redemption. We don't know how long Adam and Eve lived prior to their dreadful fall into sin but once they committed sin, they— and us who would come from them— were doomed sinners. God was not bound to save them or us, but He chose to, and from that point of choice, redemptive history began. It is recorded in Genesis 3:15. That was when God promised to send a Savior, styled as *the woman's seed*.

Redemptive history has continued from that initiating moment, approximately 6,000 years ago, to the present. It will continue until the last soul has been saved

at the end in the millennial period, culminating in the Great White Throne Judgment and totaling 7,000 years.

Since Genesis 3:15, life on planet earth has been about redemption. God has future plans for members of our race and the only way He can bring them about is through the process of redemption. Each of us must be saved to experience the wonderful things He has for us eternally (2Corinthians 2:9; Ephesians 2:7).

### **What I mean by *observation* of redemptive history**

Since virtually the whole of human history has been about redemption, so is the Bible. The Bible *exists* because of our need for salvation. It's the Book that presents it and records it. The Bible literally shows us the process of redemption from the earliest of times. In its inspired pages, we see God saving souls and so we can observe the means by which He saves them.

### **Redemptive history was progressive in nature.**

This fact is necessary to understand. Salvation was a process that necessitated the death of Christ on the cross. That would take a lot of time to bring about. The ultimate salvation that Christ would bring would not be available to the world for four thousand years. But leading up to it, there were stages of development along the way. These involve periods of time that theologians call dispensations. In them, salvation was provided (dispensed) to the human race by a primitive means — primitive when compared to the salvation of the Christian era, which followed upon the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The means of salvation to those who would believe in God throughout the various dispensations leading up to Christianity varied with the dispensation. They form an interesting and informative timeline. As mentioned, redemptive history is well documented in Scripture. Therefore, we can observe the various means granted by God throughout the dispensations by looking into the Scriptural record. This is good practice because, by the same means of observation, we can be assured of Christian salvation doctrine.

Let's observe the redemptive history timeline from the beginning.

### **The time of Cain and Abel**

Redemptive history began with simple animal sacrifices, as we see in the offering of Abel (Genesis 4). Abel's offering pleased God well. It was the means of salvation at the time.

### **The patriarchal dispensation**

As redemptive history advanced, God narrowed His focus to obtaining a special people, who would come to be known as the Jews. It began with the call of Abraham, the father of the Jewish race. God made a covenant with Abraham that his descendants would be His people and that He would give them their own land. Because Abraham believed God, he obtained righteousness, which is a theological way to say that he was in right standing with God. Animal sacrifices continued to be observed.

Abraham's covenant with God was passed on to his offspring. The Jewish forefathers, who came after Abraham, kept their covenant with the God of Abraham. It was their means of righteousness as well.

### **Moses and the dispensation of the Law**

Moses ushered in a new dispensation. Animal sacrifices continued, but through a more complex sacrificial system of the Law, as we observe in the books of the Pentateuch. There were daily sacrifices but also the required yearly sacrifice on the day of atonement. This was their means to be in right standing with God.

### **John the Baptist**

In the writings of the New Testament, we can observe that salvation took a revolutionary turn when John the Baptist came on the scene. It pivoted to a system of faith, rather than of works. Sacrifices for sin were no longer required. Faith was. Remission of sins occurred through the simple means of water baptism. John taught people to look for the Promised Savior of the world (Matthew 3:11) and then announced Him when His time to appear had come (John 1:29).

Salvation during John's time was through faith and water baptism unto repentance. It is easily observable in the Gospel record.

### **Jesus Christ**

Each step or dispensation was leading the world closer to the time when Christ would come and offer salvation to the world— salvation directly based on His perfect blood, not that of mere animals.

Christ came into the world approximately 4,000 years after Adam and Eve. Since He was the Savior, He could save by His very word and often saved in that way (e.g., Mark 2:5; Luke 23:43). Additionally, He said that people who heard His word and believed in Him had everlasting life (e.g., John 5:24; 6:47). He also

continued the practice of baptism (John 3:22,26). This is what we observe regarding salvation on the redemptive history timeline during the ministry of Jesus Christ, which lasted about three and a half years.

### **John 8:31-32**

Importantly, Jesus also expressed that people who believed in Him were to continue in His Word, indicating there was more truth forthcoming.

**31** *Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;*

**32** *And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.*

One of the ways in which further revelation from Christ came is through His commission to His Apostles (John 17:20).

**Jesus' Great Commission** contained the tenets of salvation prescribed by Christ for the Christian dispensation, which would begin on the Day of Pentecost, after His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. These included repentance, water baptism in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and the infilling of the Holy Ghost.

### **The Christian era**

All of us today on the timeline of redemptive history are in the Christian era. Christianity began on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). It will continue until the Rapture of the Church. As mentioned, the history of the first thirty years is provided for us in the book of Acts. It is a reliable, observable history of how people were saved under the ministry of the hand-picked disciples of Christ, including Peter, Paul, Philip, Ananias, and others. In it, we can see thousands of people being saved from every people group in the world— Jews, Samaritans, and Gentiles. They all fulfilled the tenets of faith Jesus gave His Apostles in the Great Commission. Those tenets were faithfully revealed to the world by Peter on the Day of Pentecost. When asked by convicted souls seeking salvation, Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:38-39).

This is what we observe about Christian salvation on the actual redemptive history timeline offered in the book of Acts. It makes salvation doctrine foolproof. It is one of the greatest proofs available in Scripture for knowing how to be saved. Any earnest consideration of the correct plan of salvation must include these cases of actual conversion provided in Acts.

## Summary

The reason the redemptive history timeline is so effective to prove salvation doctrine is because it does not rely on interpretation of verses that may be misconstrued or misunderstood. We see exactly what God *did* to save souls. And, what God did in the first generation of Christians, He is still doing today. There is nothing more certain than that. Salvation for one is salvation for all (Ephesians 4:5).

Trying to interpret individual verses of Scripture to arrive at salvation doctrine can be like looking at a few puzzle pieces and trying to imagine what the whole picture is about. Naturally, in such a case, imagination could be misleading, especially if it stems from a pre-conceived idea that's popular. In contrast, arriving at salvation doctrine from observation of redemptive history is like viewing a puzzle that has been completed. It is easy to see the picture exactly as it is.

## Addendum

### **See how observation of the redemptive history timeline dissolves other seeming theological dilemmas.**

Some people have a problem trying to understand how to interpret Matthew 28:19. Does baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost mean to repeat those very words over the baptizee? Or, by those words, was Jesus teaching us to baptize in His Own name? People have interpreted Matthew 28:19 both ways. Who's right? For us, it's not so much a matter of interpretation as it is one of observation. Matthew 28:19 has already been interpreted 2,000 years ago by those to whom it was commanded. How did they fulfill it? They were the ones to whom Christ gave perfect understanding of doctrinal issues (Luke 24:45). They fulfilled this segment of the Great Commission by baptizing in the name of Jesus Christ. End of discussion. What further thing is there to say? Does anyone really think they did not carry out Jesus' command? It's obvious they did. It's there to see in Acts, beginning on the Day of Pentecost. This is why we can confidently say, Acts solves all salvation doctrine issues. Christian salvation is showcased in Acts.

### **The example of John 3:5**

*Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.*

Numerous explanations, some ludicrous, have been given for John 3:5. In reality, it can only mean one thing. It has to refer to the salvation seen in Acts (entering the Kingdom of God). And it has to be evident on the Day of Pentecost because three thousand people were saved that day. Therefore, it must refer to Acts 2:38.

There is no other possibility. Salvation observed equals understanding of John 3:5.

### **Matthew 16:19**

*And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

There have been many efforts to make this verse mean something other than what it does. Taken outside the context of its fulfillment, it could be made to mean almost anything. But since it involves redemptive history (entering the Kingdom of heaven), it can be observed on the redemptive history timeline. Jesus gave Peter the *keys to the Kingdom of heaven*. He would be the one to introduce salvation to the world. That is evident from its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost when Peter became the spokesman to preach Acts 2:38 for the first time.

### **Conclusion**

The greatest confusion of all dispensations regarding the specific means of salvation is in the Christian era. Of course, it's not that the Bible is confusing. Men have confused it. There are many unfounded beliefs today about how to be saved. But, again, the way to be sure is by the inspired historical record of conversions. The book of Acts exclusively provides that history. All the examples of Christian salvation are in the book of Acts. There, as in every other dispensation, we see what God actually did in saving souls. There is no greater evidence of the right way to be saved than seeing salvation take place in the lives of real, everyday people. It completes the puzzle and puts all salvation Scriptures into perspective.