

ESCHATOLOGICAL SALVATION IN HEBREWS 1:5-2:5

Oyetade, M.O.

Department of Religions,

University of Ilorin,

Ilorin, Nigeria

revoyetademich@yahoo.com

Abstract

Salvation which is an indispensable element in all religions, is provided in one way in both OT and NT, and also rooted in grace, faith and sacrifice. This same salvation has past, present and future dimensions. The eschatology which is from two Greek words-εσχρατος and λογια means a study of last things which future aspect of salvation addresses. Methodologies adopted in this paper were historical and exegetical. The historical method was used in order to reconstruct the past both in biblical times and in the 21st century Church. The exegetical method was for a comprehensive examination of both the content and the context to enhance better interpretation of the relevant text. Data were gathered through secondary sources in which consultations were made through published works and the internet. It has been established in this paper that eschatology is essential to salvation and that without the completion or consummation of the eschatological prophecies salvation is not complete. By implication therefore, Christians are warned against loosing the future salvation by a careless inattention to the contexts of Hebrews 9:28 or practice in daily life, a text which focuses both on Christ's death and return. Therefore, the eschatological connection with salvation is incontrovertible.

Introduction

Although we cannot know the future, we certainly try. Knowing what the future holds fascinates us. We all want to know what the future will look like. Not surprisingly, Canale opines that "prophecies about the end of the world captivate even postmodern minds; simple curiosity attracts us to biblical prophecies"¹. In our eagerness to know what will happen in the future, we often forget the strong connection that exists between biblical eschatology and soteriology. As a result, we may fail to understand both. Usually, a Christian theologian like Canale sees the relation of soteriology with eschatology from the side of soteriology².

According to Canale, Walter believes that eschatology is the consummation of the kingdom of God and Christ's work of salvation inaugurated at the cross. As a result of this view, the understanding of salvation does not depend on eschatology and can be treated separately³. To Canale eschatology assumes soteriology. "Eschatology is not the consummation of the work of Christ, but the anticipation of Christ's multifaceted historical works of salvation from creation to new creation. We should study soteriology from the perspective of prophetic interpretation and not the other way round"⁴. What is the actual extent of eschatological salvation? How can the eschatology of the warning passages in the book of Hebrews be enjoyed in anticipation? What is the eschatological impact on Salvation? Can we properly understand Christ's work of salvation (soteriology) in isolation from prophetic interpretation? Could the study of biblical prophecies concerning eschatology provide the broad context from which Christians should understand Christ's work of salvation (soteriology)? These and many questions will be addressed in this paper.

Meaning of Eschatology

Eschatology is the doctrine of the last things⁵. It was originally a Western term, referring to Jewish and Christian, beliefs about the end of history, the resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, the messianic era, and the problem of theodicy (the vindication of God's justice). Historians of religion have applied the term to similar themes and concepts in the religions of nonliterate peoples, ancient Mediterranean and Middle Eastern cultures, and Eastern civilizations *Encyclopedia Britannica* remarks⁶. In the history of religion, the term eschatology refers to conceptions of the last things: immortality of the soul, rebirth, resurrection, migration of the soul, and the end of time. These concepts also have secular parallels—for example, in the turning points of one's life and in one's understanding of death. Often these notions are contrasted with the experience of suffering in the world. Eschatological themes thrive during crises, serving as consolation for those who hope for a better world or as motivation for a revolutionary transformation of society.⁷

Shaped by the extent and nature of the believer's involvement in the world, eschatological expectations assume either an individual or a collective form, embracing individual souls, a people or group, humanity, or the whole cosmos. The social implications of the two forms of eschatology are significant. Individual forms tend to foster either apolitical or politically conservative attitudes—predicated on the belief that each

person experiences God's judgment upon death and that there is therefore little purpose to changing the world. Some forms of collective eschatology, however, involve political activism and the expectation of the public manifestation of God's justice. Not only do they hope for collective corporeal salvation and a transformation of the world, but they actively prepare for it.

The term *ἔσχατος* does not, however, serve merely to denote the new tie that began with the coming of Jesus. It also refers to the final, consummative action of God that is still to come. In 1 Cor. 15:23-28. Paul expresses the chronological sequence of the future events of the final ties. In this scheme death is chronologically the last and physically the hardest enemy to be destroyed before the final goal of God is reached (1 Cor. 15:26-28). In the word of Wales, the word eschatology is derived from “two Greek words *ἔσχατος*, meaning ‘last’ and “*λόγια* meaning ‘study’ or ‘discourse’” It is the study of the end of things, whether the end of an individual life, the end of the age, or the end of the world. Broadly speaking, it is the study of the destiny of man as it is revealed in the Bible, which is the primary source for all Christian eschatological studies⁸.

Christian eschatology is concerned with afterlife starting with death, an intermediate state to either heaven or hell. Events said to happen at the end of this age include, the return of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead, a rapture, a great tribulation, the Millennium or thousand years of peace, which has been interpreted both literally and symbolically., end of the world, the last judgment, a new heaven and a new earth, and the ultimate consummation of all of God's purposes. Eschatological passages are found in many places in the bible, especially Isa.2:2-4, Dan.2:28-45, Matt. 12:22-32, and Rev.14:15, but Revelation often occupies a central place in Christian eschatology.

Meaning of Salvation

The Greek noun translated salvation is “soteria” σωτηρία (found 45 times in the Greek New Testament). It denotes deliverance and preservation and also it means cure, recovery, remedy. Literarily, salvation means preservation or deliverance from destruction, difficulty, or evil. Salvation also is the state of being preserved from harm, it denotes saving someone from an unpleasant situation⁹. In the Hebrew language Matthew also adds that, the word for salvation “is *y°shu°ah* ישועה , from which we have Joshua. *yāsha°* ישׁ has this meaning: to be wide, or roomy - a broad and spacious place. *yāsha°* ישׁ communicates the idea of

freedom. It is "liberation from confinement, constriction, and limitation"¹⁰. The word "salvation" in the Bible is used in different ways. The basic meaning is "deliverance from danger." It also denotes healing of diseases, deliverance from fear, deliverance from famine, deliverance from enemies, deliverance from bondage, and so on. Exodus 14:30 says, "That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore." So in this verse the word is used with reference to God's deliverance of Israel from the bondage of Egypt.

A brief look at some scholars shows that salvation means different things to different people. McKenzie, an Old Testament scholar understands salvation as freedom of the Israelites from their bondage. In his argument for the physical aspect of salvation, he says that "the meaning of salvation is best seen in the paradigmatic saving act, the exodus from Egypt"¹¹ Kato, an African Biblical scholar argues that, "man's fundamental problem is sin against God and that salvation is the only way through Jesus Christ." In other words, he takes seriously the statement of Peter in Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."¹² Another African view of salvation is that of Mbiti, he argues that, God rescues people when all other help is exhausted, and that this rescue is primarily from material and physical dilemmas. God does not save because he is saviour; rather, he becomes saviour when he does save.¹³

It is particularly very interesting to note how liberation theologians define salvation. Generally, they believe that liberation is salvation. This view is well represented and summarized by Schonherr, "Liberation is salvation. It is for Here and Now, and has to take place in any human situation which is characterized by a fundamental corruption of the social-political context of man".¹⁴ The church has for too long concentrated on the 'soul' of the individual believer. It did not see that the plight of man is rooted in the perversion of his social and political structure. They enslave him, deprive him of his dignity, and violate his rights. Because of this structural perversion there is poverty, hunger, neo-colonial domination, racial discrimination, economic exploitation, and social injustice in many variations. This structural perversion reveals the evidence of sin and causes the fundamental alienation of man.¹⁵

According to Caleb Ogunkunle, the cause for salvation is the state of depression which could be spiritual or physical. Spiritually, an individual, who yields to the temptation of the wicked one, will certainly

find himself in the bondage of sin. He will be depressed until he is delivered and finds peace with God. Physically, an individual or nation may be depressed because of the distressful situation he finds himself may be sickness, hunger etc. Depression will continue until there is a help somewhere. Therefore, salvation is bringing assistance into any distressful situation. It is to bring relief to the person, or victory to the nation concerned.¹⁶

Eschatological Salvation

Eschatological salvation can be described as entrance into eternal life or into the joy of the Lord that has no end. (Mt.25:21,23) . According to Wales, it is the future salvation which means two things: deliverance from suffering which has to do with this evil world and perfected fellowship with God when Christ shall come to set up his eternal kingdom”¹⁷. Eschatological salvation includes immortal resurrection life of the age to come (Lk.20:35), the evils of the physical weakness, sickness, and death will be swallowed up in the life of the believers in the kingdom of God (Mt.25:34, 46). .Eschatological salvation means not only the redemption of the body but also the restoration of communion between God and humanity that had been broken by sin. The pure in heart will see God (Mt.5:8) and enter into the joy of their Lord (Mt.25:21, 23). This eschatology consummation is usually described in pictures drawn from daily life. The harvest will take place and the grain will be gathered into the barn (Mt.13:30, 39; Mk.4:29 cf .Mt.3:12; Rev.14:15). The sheep will be separated from the goats and brought safely into the fold (Mt.25:32). The most common picture is that of a feast or table fellowship.

According to Salmon, a study of eschatology offers Christians an impetus for a closer walk with the Lord and a godly life before others. Though believers may face difficult problems, they belong to the supreme King of eternity. Having a relationship with Christ and the promise of final victory over the enemies of God should motivate Christians to make obedience and service to God their chief desire. Walking in obedience to His word will result in rewards in the coming millennial rule of Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Context of Hebrews Chap. 1: 5- 2: 5

The Book of Hebrews emphasizes the importance of believers living with a view to future service in the Lord’s millennial kingdom. The writer directed his readers to this future viewpoint throughout the epistle,

especially in the five warning passages (2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 6:4–12; 10:26–39; 12:25–29). Hebrews opens with the writer’s main thesis, dealing with the superiority of Christ. Hebrews chapter one describes Christ’s supremacy in revealing God over the previous revelation of God to the patriarchs by the prophets of the Old Testament (1:1–2a). It also declares the supremacy of the Son in His essential being and ongoing activities in the present (1:2b–4) as well as in the coming eschatological kingdom (1:5–14). Hebrews 1:1–4, the prologue of the epistle, is bound together as one unbroken grammatical construction in Greek, with the central assertion (v. 2) that God has spoken ἐν υἱῷ (“in Son”). The word “Son” stresses the quality of His person. Secondly, though the prologue does not contain an explicit warning, the foundation is laid for the first caveat in 2:1–4 by demonstrating the unique person and character of Christ. The prologue, through a triad of relative clauses, expands on the person of the Son.¹⁹

Kasemamann opines that the idea of the Son’s heirship (κληρονόμον πάντων, “heir of all things,” 1:2) points to His eschatological role as King in the millennial kingdom. Thirdly, the idea of inheritance is seen in that Christ has inherited a name—the title “Son” (v. 4)—which is better than that of the angels. This title of Son (υἱός) in verse 5 is identical with “name” (ὄνομα) in verse 4. At Christ’s ascension and exaltation to the right hand of the Father the title “Son” was conferred.²⁰

Christ Superiority over Angels. (Heb.1:4-5)

Throughout biblical history, Ryken says that “angels provided guidance, help and encouragement to God’s people. This is perhaps why they can be referred to as “ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Heb. 1:14).²¹ In the light of the above activities of the angels, it will still be wrong to focus more on angels than upon the sufficiency of Christ as the Great High Priest and Mediator. Basing his arguments upon familiar Old Testament verses, the author in ten verses Hebrews 1:5-14 brilliantly constructs a convincing contrast between Christ, the Creator and the created angels. In conclusion, it demonstrates that Christ is far superior to the angels and He alone warrants the readers’ adoration, worship and obedience.

Hebrews 1:5-14 constitutes a marvelous choreography of Old Testament passages which, like a well-programmed ballet, catches our immediate interest with two Messianic phrases: one from Psalm 2:7 and the other from 2 Samuel 7:13. Both center on the name of the “Son” which

must belong properly to Jesus and to no one else. It is true that angels are called "sons of God" in the book of Job (1:6; 2:1; 38:7) because, like Adam, they are direct creations from God's hand. This fact may seem to mark angels as equal with Jesus and therefore proper objects of worship. But Jesus is God's Son from eternity, the uncreated Son. Furthermore, the quotation from Psalm 2 highlights Jesus' status as the exalted Son of Man, as Paul declared in his sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:33) referring to his resurrection from the dead. Thus, he was both the eternal Son and the glorified human Son. That is, Son of man and Son of God.

Stedman notes that "The writer here especially claims the superiority of Jesus over the angels as the Son of Man. None of the angels could claim either eternity or resurrection as the basis of his sonship, but Jesus had both". In this case, He is superior. Though the angels collectively were called sons of God, no individual angel ever is given that title, or singled out as having a unique status before God. So the writer demands rhetorically, To which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father."²² Psalm 2 is one of the royal enthronement Psalms, which should be understood within the context of the Davidic covenant in which Yahweh promised David that his line would endure forever (2 Sam. 7:8-16; Ps. 89)²³. Psalm 2 is specifically applied to Jesus in Revelation 12:5 and 19:15 and to those who share his kingdom reign in Revelation 2:27, especially in conjunction with the words "you will rule them with an iron scepter" (Ps 2:9). The implication here seems to be that Psalm 2:7 refers to the time when Messiah, after suffering and death, is brought back to the realm of the living. This understanding would agree with Paul's use of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:33 and clearly the word today refers to the resurrection of Jesus rather than the day of his birth in Bethlehem, or of his baptism in the Jordan.

The second source of support from the Old Testament draws on 2 Samuel 7:14. Historically, the words "I will be his father, and he will be my Son" were originally to David concerning Solomon when the prophet Nathan told David that Solomon will build a house for God. However, it is clear that David's power would extend to his descendants, which would also include the Messiah. The human nature of the Lord is underscored by his title Son of David. As the risen Man, he claims the throne of David, but as such the Father calls him my Son. By these two quotations, with their royal implications, the writer of Hebrews claims that being related to God as a Son is a far greater title than any angel could claim.

The angels were created, but the Son is begotten. Since the earliest

times, Christian commentators have differed on what the 'again' refers to in verse 6. If it is taken with the verb he says ("he says again"), as in the NIV, it simply means another quotation that supports the superiority of Jesus. If, however, it is linked with the verb brings ("he brings again"), it is a reference either to the coming of Jesus at the incarnation, his reappearance after the resurrection, or his Second Coming at the end of the age. In view of the connected character of these quotations, it seems best to take it as a second support citation, "he says again." Twice in Hebrews Jesus is called firstborn (Heb.1:6 and in 12:23). These verses seem to refer to his creative work. Paul's great assertion is recorded in Colossians 1:15, "the firstborn over all creation." "The point of it all is: He whom the Hebrews thought to be subordinate to angels is the very one who the angels are commanded to worship as their creator!"²⁴

Allen, further adds that, in Heb.1:7-14 the author for the third time sweeps through Psalms 104:4 to display a chorus of verses that praise the Son who has a nature inherently superior to angels. The natural elements of wind and fire are called the messengers of God; in the Septuagint it is the angels who are made to be these elements. Though they are as powerful as the wind and can be as destructive as lightning, they are, nevertheless, only messengers of the Son while Jesus is the Son of God himself²⁵.

This sharp contrast according to Steadman, is sustained also by two verses coming from Psalm 45:6-7. Their antiphonal character with verse 6 is clear in the way they are introduced: In speaking of the angels he says, . . . But about the Son he says . . . Psalm 45 is a wedding song, originally describing a king of Israel, but later understood by the rabbis as messianic. The contrast between a royal personage and his servant-companions is the point of the quotation. This king is addressed twice as God; possesses a throne, a scepter and a kingdom; loves righteousness and hates wickedness; has a special anointing of joy; and continues as king forever and ever. No angel could claim these attributes. The cause of the king's joy is traced to his love of righteousness and hatred of wickedness. Here, by contrast, may be a hint of the moral defection of the host of angels who fell with Satan. Angels could and did sin, but the Son's love of righteousness kept him safe through the most severe temptations. Even those unfallen angels who also, presumably, love righteousness do so on the basis of choice, while the Son's love of righteousness is inherent in his very nature. For this reason therefore God has set him above his companions²⁶.

The author once again displays the dazzling glory of the Creator, who is infinitely superior to any angel, by summoning the words of Psalm 102:25-27: Of old You have laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the work of Your hands. This is not simply a restatement of truth he has already declared in verse 2, but the point he now twice asserts is the timeless endurance of the Son: They will perish, but you remain; . . . they will be changed. But you remain [Gk: "you are"] the same. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Psalm 102 is addressed to Yahweh by a sorely afflicted suppliant who feels the brevity of his own life in light of the heavens and the earth. But even they shall pass away in due course, like garments that grow old and are changed. But the Creator is above his own laws and remains unchanged forever. These words, applied unhesitatingly to Jesus, place him as far beyond the angels.

The author of Hebrews finally, for his presentation of Old Testament's support for the superiority of the nature of the Son over that of angels, returns to his rhetorical question: To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? This second reference to Psalm 110 restates the thought of 1:2, "whom he appointed heir of all things." Even his enemies will find their place at the Son's feet when God's purposes are fulfilled. It reflects Paul's declaration in Colossians 2:15, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross." The cross won the beginning of the ultimate triumph, but its fulfillment awaits the return of Jesus as King. Contrasted to this Supreme Conqueror, the writer asks, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve..." Even the mightiest angel is under orders to the Son of God, and gladly helps in fulfilling his desire to bring many sons to glory (2:10). Though the author does not enlarge on the specifics of angelic ministry here, it only requires a review of Bible stories to see that such ministry involves protection (Ps 91:11), guidance (Gen. 19:17), encouragement (Judg 6:12), deliverance (Acts 12:7), supply (Ps 105:40), enlightenment (Mt 2:19-20) and empowerment (Lk 22:43), as well as occasional rebuke (Num 22:32) and discipline (Acts 12:23). Their service is rendered largely unseen and often unrecognized, but a passage like this should make us watchful for such help and grateful to the gracious Lord who sends angels to our aid.

In this phrase "...those who will inherit salvation." Akin argues that "salvation is spoken of as something that will come up in the future" It talks about saved people who have not yet entered into their

inheritance.²⁷ In Romans 13, it says, “Now is your salvation nearer than when you believed.” Paul tells us in Rom. 8:23 what this future salvation is in the main. It is the redemption of our body, by which he means the application of redemption to the believer’s body. This will take place in the resurrection of those who sleep in Christ (1 Cor. 15:52-56; 1 Thess. 4:16) and in the rapture of those who are alive at Christ’s coming in the air (1 Thess. 4:17). It is only then that the regenerated spirit will enter into the full fruition of salvation. Thus we read that the spirit is to be saved “in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). “It is under this head that we are to classify all the passages that speak of eternal life as something the believer will receive in the future”²⁸. Salvation is past, present and future: one who is in Christ has been saved, is being saved and will be saved. That Jesus accomplished salvation is a past fact: his death delivered us once for all for the penalty and power of sin once and for all from the penalty and power of sin (John 19:30; Rom. 5:8; Titus 3:5-7; Heb. 9:12).

Yet salvation is also an ongoing and progressive present experience. Christians are sometimes described in the NT as those who are being saved (Acts 24:7; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 2:15). Those who have died with Jesus have also been raised with him and so share his life and his spirit (Rom. 6:5-14). Moreover, though salvation is a past fact, it must not be “neglected” in the present (Heb. 2:3) but rather be “held fast” (1 Cor. 15:2) and humbly “worked out” (Phil. 2:12). The final meaning of salvation will be known only at the last day, when the renewing process is complete (Phil. 1:6). The future reality of salvation is that we can look forward to being freed from sin’s presence. Having been delivered from the guilt of our sin and having progressively been delivered from sin’s power, we can look forward with great anticipation to the cessation of sin’s presence in our lives. Romans 8:23 Paul calls this the “redemption of the body.”

The Consequence of neglecting the Son (2:1 – 5)

Having proved that angels cannot be compared in importance, power or glory to the Son of God, the author now raises a warning voice against taking lightly what the Son has said. This is the first of five major warning passages in Hebrews each designed to prevent a specific form of unbelief. The five warnings are ‘... give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard..’ 2:1-4; ‘...take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief...’ 3:12-19; ‘...if they shall fall away...’ 6:4-8; ‘...for if we sin wilfully after that we have received the

knowledge of the truth...10:26-31; '...see that ye refuse not him that speaketh...' 12:25-29. The author is deeply concerned lest his readers succumb to the pressures they are feeling and either renounce the gospel outright or gradually turn from public confession and lose its influence entirely. The danger faced in this first warning is that of drifting away from the truth. A dramatic word is employed for "drift away," παραρρέω, which means "to flow by" or "slip away from." It describes that carelessness of mind which, perhaps occupied by other things, is not aware it is losing ground. Another figure often suggested is that of a ship loose from its moorings. The danger highlighted is that of a great loss occurring unnoticed. The cause is not taking seriously the words spoken to them. Inattention or apathy will rob them of their treasure.

With these words, the writer reveals his shepherd's heart, since he is not content with instructing the mind with intriguing doctrine. He also longs to reach the heart and move the will to action. The remedy is to pay more careful attention to the things heard (from the Son). To neglect or ignore these is to be in deadly danger of drifting away from essential truth, and losing, by default, the great salvation which the Son has brought. It is not necessary to openly renounce the gospel. One can remain lost by simply and quietly drifting away from hearing it, or hearing it with no comprehension of the seriousness of its message.

The word salvation forms the link between chapters one and two. The chapter division was not intended by the writer, who moved immediately (διὰ τοῦτο), "therefore") to draw a practical conclusion to the truth he has presented. σωτηρία, "salvation," is found seven times in Hebrews more than in any other New Testament book. In Zechariah's song concerning his son John the Baptist (Lk 1:67-79), he says that the Baptist's ministry was "to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (Lk 1:77). Salvation, then, begins with a moral cleansing and in later New Testament development includes justification, sanctification and, finally, glorification with Christ. The author is deeply persuaded that a personal relationship with Christ expressed in repentance and faith determines the believer's salvation. But in the teaching of the letter salvation is clearly portrayed as an ongoing process. To ignore the future salvation found in Jesus is to find oneself unable to escape the consequent wrath of God, and the judgment of hell.

The concern of Hebrews is not to defend miracles but to warn against losing the future salvation by a careless inattention to its content or its practice in daily life. An individual's response to these great truths

determines his destiny. Christ's saving work is not a piece of emotional pageantry rescuing men from nothing in particular. Neglecting the word of angels brought immediate earthly consequences; ignoring the salvation of the Son, confirmed by decades of divine ministry through godly men and women, results in eternal tragedy beyond description.

Conclusion

Eschatology is the message of hope, looking for the future, which is away from pain and sufferings, and it helps us to overcome challenges and strive forward for a better tomorrow. Eschatology gives meaning to life on earth and it is an impetus for mission of the church. As we wait for the glorious coming of the Lord at the end of time, we are urged to be active agents in bringing about a transformed world. The salvation to which Peter speaks, to which scripture testifies, that the Father has inaugurated through the obedience of the Son in the power of Spirit is an objective thing waiting to burst into this present age- so lush with fecundity- that heaven and earth will be made new, recreated, at its unveiling. But right now salvation's fullness remains in the future. Therefore, Biblical eschatology involves more than the consummation of Christ's atonement or the anticipation of the last historical events on planet earth. Eschatology and salvation, then, belong together since Christ's first promise of salvation to the human race after Adam's and Eve's fall (Genesis 3:15). Promise and fulfillment are always redemptive. Prophecy is not mere anticipation of historical facts disconnected from God's works of salvation.

Eschatology predicts the continuation of Christ's works of salvation in human and cosmic history. Consequently, we cannot separate eschatology from the salvation without distorting the meaning of both. Eschatology anticipates the progressive execution and development of God's atonement before and after Christ's incarnation and death on the cross. Christians should use the historicist interpretation of Biblical prophecy as hermeneutical presupposition to guide their understanding of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ.

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