

An Exegetical and Theological Study of “Savior of All Men” in 1 Tim 4:10

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Abstract

Paul’s statement that God is the “Savior of all men, especially of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:10) has attracted differing interpretations. From the perspective of universal atonement, God has made salvation possible for all men, subject to their faith in Christ’s atoning death. Universalists suggest that all humankind will be saved based on 1 Tim 4:10. Calvinists, who subscribe to limited atonement, argue that “all men” in 1 Tim 4:10 means “all kinds” or “all groups” of people will be saved. Several questions arise concerning this passage, such as: Is salvation available to all men based on faith in Christ? Will God save all humanity, as Universalists assert? Is God a potential Savior for all humankind? What does the use of the adverb “malista” imply? Therefore, this study employs exegetical steps to determine the meaning and purpose of 1 Tim 4:10 in the context of 4:6-10. Through contextual analysis, the study concludes that although God is inclined to save everyone, He saves those who honor Him as King in their lives.

Introduction

There have been theological debates about the meaning of 1 Tim 4:10. Several questions arise regarding this passage, such as: Is salvation for all men dependent on one’s faith in the atoning death of Christ? Will God save all humanity as the Universalists believe? Does “all men” in the

¹ Universalism is the theological view that all humanity will eventually be saved because “there is no final damnation, and that hell is a temporary place whose function is to purify that soul before they can be in the presence of God.” Justo L. Gonzalez, “Universalism,” in *Essential Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 178.

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passage imply salvation for “all kinds” or “all groups” of people? Is the passage about God being the potential Savior of all humankind, or is it a polemic against the Ephesian concept of *soter* (savior)? How does Scripture portray God as Savior in the Pastoral Epistles? What is the meaning of *malista* (especially) and *panton anthropon* (all men) in the passage? How should we interpret the phrase “especially those who believe” today? What is the meaning of *soter* and its relation to salvation? Is today’s interpretation different from the authorial intent or past interpretations? The following lines will provide insight into this issue.

This study uses a historical-grammatical exegetical approach, focusing on context, lexical studies, and theology. It aims to understand biblical texts’ original intent within their cultural settings. This paper explores 1 Timothy 4:10 within the framework of Paul’s teachings, the context of the Ephesian community, and the nuances of Greek language. It also assesses the passage’s relation to biblical themes of salvation. Apart from the introduction, summary, and conclusion, the study features a primary section split into three subsections. The first subsection examines the historical and literary contexts of 1 Timothy. The second subsection presents a lexical study of “*soter*,” “*panton anthropon*,” and the superlative “*malista*.” This will be followed by a literary analysis and interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10 and other exegetical tasks applicable to the passage.

Historical and Literary Context of 1 Tim 4:10

This section examines the historical and literary context of 1 Tim 4:10. This information will help us understand the background of the passage and bring out its meaning.

Historical Context of 1 Tim 4:10

The authorship and date of 1 Timothy have been widely debated among scholars because the book falls outside the scope of Paul’s ministry accounts in the book of Acts.² However, tradition attributes the authorship

² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed., Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 46:lvi-lxix; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1978), 367, 384; G. W. Knight, “The Scriptures Were Written for Our Instruction,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996): 3-13; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and Philemon* (Columbus: Wartburg, 1946), 474-80.

to Paul, who may have written it between 63 and 67 AD.³ The impact, enduring relevance, and importance of Paul of Tarsus in Christianity are immense. As the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul championed Christ's message of liberty, culture, and understanding.⁴ As the apostle sent to the Gentiles, he traveled extensively through regions such as Corinth (Acts 18:1-12) and Ephesus (Acts 18:19-21; 20:16-38). The letter's recipient was Timothy, who first appears in Acts 16:1-3 as a respected believer in Lystra, Derbe, and Iconium. His father was Greek, while his mother was a Jewess (Acts 16:1; 20:4; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:14, 15), making Timothy a Jew. During Paul's second and third missionary journeys, he chose the reliable Timothy as a co-worker (Acts 16:3; 1 Cor 4:17) and co-author (Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1:1).⁵ Paul refers to him as my true "son" in the faith (*teknon*, 1 Cor 4:17; 1 Tim 1:2, 18), and he was circumcised by Paul (Acts 14:6, 7). First Timothy was written by Paul from Philippi in Macedonia to Timothy, who was in Ephesus.⁶

Although Paul was optimistic about visiting him in Ephesus, he sent this letter in the meantime (1 Tim 3:14, 15). The letter aimed to guide Timothy on managing Church affairs (3:14, 15) and to advise him on nurturing a spiritually disciplined life (4:12-16; Acts 20:29).⁷ It encouraged him to endure whatever trials he was facing and to be strong in faith, especially in his dealings with apostasy and heresies (3:1-11) in the church. Though this was a personal letter, much of it was intended for the benefit of the entire Ephesian Church. The theme of the letter is 1 Tim 3:14, 15: "These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave

³ See Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 584-622; John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical, Galatians-Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 11; William Hendrickson, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1957), 33; Ralph Earle, "1 and 2 Timothy," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary in 12 Vol.*, ed., Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 11:342; J. N. D. Kelley, *A Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, Harper's New Testament Commentaries (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1980), 34.

⁴ Glenn W. Baker, William L. Lane and J. Ramsey Michaels, *The New Testament Speaks* (New York, NY: Harper & Row 1969), 143, 145-148.

⁵ Mounce, 46: liv; Hendrikson, 33-36; John Peter Lange, *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal and Homiletical, Galatians-Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 9.

⁶ Earle, 11:344; Lange, 10.

⁷ Lange, 11; Earle, 11:344; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament*, rev., ed., (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990), 649.

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thyslf in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (KJV).

Paul first visited Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23-21:16), where he met Priscilla and Aquila ministering. Ephesus was "the first and greatest metropolis of Asia," as attested by many inscriptions in the city. It was the capital of the province of Asia during Augustus's rule in 29 B.C.E. and had a population of between 100,000 and 150,000. Consequently, it was ranked only below Rome and Alexandria. Furthermore, inscriptions in the city attest to its wealth and demographic diversity because it was a significant port city. The temple of the goddess Artemis was located in the town (Acts 19:23-41).⁸

Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos are credited with establishing the Church in Ephesus; it was not founded by the apostles (Acts 19:1-20; 1 Cor 16:19). Paul stayed in this city for about three years and faced many adversities (Acts 19:23-41; 1 Cor 15:32; 16:9). In 2 Cor 1:8-9, Paul discusses the affliction he endured in Asia, which almost brought him to the point of death, but God saved him. Paul's experience there was unpleasant. Furthermore, Rev 2:6 mentions the Nicolaitans and their activities.⁹ Paul was aware of the situation in Ephesus when he wrote to Timothy.

In Ephesus, *Soter* was used as a title or description for the gods, emperors, provincial proconsuls, and local patrons. This is well documented in the Ephesian inscriptions. Roman rulers were deified, and one of the titles they used was "savior."¹⁰ Baugh indicates that the title "Soter" designates the honoree as a provider of general protection, beneficence, or patronage and is, therefore, functionally equivalent to the terms "patron" or "benefactor." Additionally, "Soter" is sometimes used synonymously with the word "euergetes," meaning "benefactor."¹¹

⁸ See L. M. White, "Urban Development and Social Change in Imperial Ephesus," in *Ephesus: Metropolis of Asia*, ed. H. Koster, *Harvard Theological Studies* 41:27-79; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Anchor Bible, vol 35A, eds., William Foxwell Albright and Davie Noel Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 2001), 142; Mounce, 46: 1.

⁹ A. J. Malherbe, "The Beast of Ephesus," in *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 79-90.

¹⁰ L. R. Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor* (Middletown, CT: American Philological Association, 1931; reprint Scholars Press, n. d.), 35; Steven M. Baugh, "Savior of all People:" 1 Tim 4:10 in Context, *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 337. Taylor's view is challenged by S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

¹¹ Baugh, 335-36.

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An inscription in Ephesus honoring Julius Caesar depicts him as the “universal savior of human life” because he prevented Q. Caecilius Scipio from confiscating money deposited in the temple of Artemis in 48 BC.¹² With this background, some authors believe that Paul’s use of *soter* in this epistle was influenced by its usage in Ephesus (Acts 19:10). Paul knew how the people understood and employed this term in their daily lives; they therefore conclude that he meant “protector,” “benefactor,” or “patron,” as used in Ephesus.¹³

In summary, although 1 Timothy falls outside the scope of Paul’s missionary activities in the book of Acts, he wrote this epistle. Timothy, a companion of Paul, is the recipient of the epistle. Timothy is instructed on how to conduct himself when addressing the heresies in Ephesus.

Literary Context of 1 Tim 4:10

First Timothy 4:10 falls within the pericope ranging from verses 1-16. This chapter predicts a coming time of apostasy, marked by people teaching doctrines contrary to Paul’s teachings (4:1-5). It details the work Timothy was expected to accomplish in Ephesus. Verses 1-2 indicate that false teachings were prevalent in the Church of Ephesus, with a list given in verses 3-5. In verses 6-8, Paul admonishes Timothy to demonstrate the worth of his ministry by standing firm against these false teachings. In verses 9-10, Paul refers to a “trustworthy statement,” a phrase occurring five times in the Pauline epistles, used to introduce important sayings (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 3:8).¹⁴ Paul’s general concern in verses 6-8 is resumed in verses 11-16: Timothy should teach the correct doctrines, stand firm, and demonstrate his physical and spiritual integrity.

¹² Baugh points out that the monies deposited in the Artemisium were for individuals and nations, so the people saw that Caesar had done so much for them, hence his name and title (Baugh, 337).

¹³ Baugh, 336; J. Schneider and C. Brown. “Sōtēr.” *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 3, ed., Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 3:217.

¹⁴ Mounce, 46:48.

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Lexical Studies

This section examines the use and meaning of the words *soter*, *malista*, and the phrase *panton anthropon* to determine how their usage in other passages can help us better interpret the passage under study.

The Use of “Soter” in the Septuagint (LXX), Greek Literature and NT

This section of the study surveys the use of “soter” in the LXX, Greek literature, and the NT to ascertain its meaning and usage throughout the ages.

The Use of “Soter” in the LXX

In the LXX, “Soter” appears about 36 times and refers to the Hebrew words *yešū’ā*, *yāša’* and the participle *môšīa’* of the verb *yāša’* in *hiphil*, all of which derive from the stem *yš’* meaning “deliver,” “liberate,” “help,” and “save” (Ps 4; Deut 32:15; Isa 12:2; Ps 62:2, 6; Judg 3:9, 15; 12:3; 1 Sam 10:19; Isa 45:15, 21; Neh 9:27). However, it is not used as a title.¹⁵ As Schneider and Brown have observed, in the LXX, Yahweh is often referred to as *Soter*. The Messiah in the LXX is not explicitly presented as *Soter*. Nevertheless, the promised king of Israel in Zech 9:9 is associated with salvation; here, the participle *sozon* is employed. Furthermore, Isa 49:6 indicates that Yahweh’s salvation will reach the ends of the earth through His Servant.¹⁶

While the judges are sometimes referred to as “soter” (e.g., Judg 3:9, 15), it is clear from the Old Testament that it was Yahweh who raised the judges for Israel to rescue them from their enemies (Judg 12:3; 2:16), and He was with the judge (Judg 2:18).¹⁷ Nehemiah 9:27 makes this clear. Similarly, while a king of Israel may be referred to as *Soter* (2 Kings 13:5), it is Yahweh who is the “helper” and the “deliverer” (*ho rhyomenos*) of Israel from their troubles. Though the Judges are called saviors, they are not the ones who delivered Israel from their enemies; it was Yahweh (Judg 2:18) who delivered Israel through them.¹⁸

¹⁵ Fohrer, “*Sōtēr in the OT*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 7:1012-1013; Schneider and Brown, 3:217.

¹⁶ Schneider and Brown, 3:218.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Fohrer, 7:1012-1013; W. L. Liefeld, “Salvation,” *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: Illustrated in Four Volumes*, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 4:291.

Besides the specific use of *Soter* for Yahweh, other Old Testament passages point to His saving activities. For example, He delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage (Exod 14:13, 30), making Him the Savior indeed (Deut 32:15; Ps 25:5; 106:21). The concept of “*go’el*” also underscores Yahweh’s role as Savior (cf. Job 19:25; 41:14).¹⁹ Isaiah 45:15 and 63:8-10 vividly depict Yahweh as the Savior of Israel (cf. Isa 43:3,11; 45:15,21; 49:26; 60:16; Jer 14:8; Hos 13:4).²⁰

In the Old Testament, Yahweh is the Savior, “not only of those who enter his everlasting kingdom but also, in a sense, of others; indeed, of all those whom he delivers from temporary disaster.”²¹ Yahweh’s providence extends to all, including plants and animals (Ps 36:6; 104:27, 28; 145:9, 16, 17; Jonah 4:10, 11). God is identified as the “Preserver,” “Deliverer,” and “Savior.” However, the nation’s complete deliverance can only be achieved through the Messiah.²²

The Use of *Soter* in the Greek World

Soter in the Greek world had various meanings. Many gods considered saviors of humanity from danger were also viewed as “protectors” and “preservers” of the city and its citizens. Additionally, *Soter* was used as an honor for humans and to deify rulers.²³ In line with this, some scholars interpret *soter* as a “generous benefactor and often a deliverer during emergencies.”²⁴ Furthermore, the use of “*Soter*” in various inscriptions in Asia Minor for kings, emperors, governors, and local patron gods seems to point to the meaning “benefactor.” The inscriptions from Ephesus

¹⁹ R. E. O. White, “*Savior*,” *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (EDT)*, 2nd. ed., ed., Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 1057.

²⁰ Yahweh as the Savior of Israel is indicated in several other places in the OT such as Deut 32:15; I Chron 16:35; Ps 24:5; 25:5; 26:1,9; Prov 29:25; Mic 7:7; Hab 3:18; Isa 12:2; 17:10; 25:9; 62:11.

²¹ Hendriksen, 155.

²² White, *EDT*, 1057; Hendriksen, 156.

²³ Baugh, 335; Schneider and Brown, 3:216; Foerster, “*Soter*,” 7:1003-1012; Liefeld, 4:290; Lenski, 491; Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest Word Studies from the Greek New Testament for English Readers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 2:72; Schneider and Brown, 3:216.

²⁴ A. D. Nock, “*Soter* and *Euergetes*,” in *Essays on Religion and the Ancient World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 2:720-35; F. W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis, MO: Clayton, 1982), 324-25; Foerster, “*Soter* in the New Testament,” 7:1017.

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indicate that “*Soter*” often appears alongside such terms as “*euergetes*” (benefactor), “*ktistes*” (creator), and “*kedemon*” (protector).²⁵

Some scholars posit that Paul borrowed and used “*Soter*” from the Greek perspective. However, Lenski points out that the title “savior” in Greek usage is at a low level of political and economic life and never rises to the spiritual and eternal. The Christian use is derived from the Old Testament riches, augmented by the New Testament light.²⁶

Therefore, Paul’s use of “*Soter*” is not derived from Greek usage, but bears Old Testament traits. Unlike in the Old Testament, where the act of saving is God’s prerogative, in the Greek world, “*Soter*” is used in connection with the saving acts of both men and gods. Thus, in ancient Greek and the Septuagint, “*Soter*” often conveys roles like deliverer or benefactor, applied to God and earthly rulers. In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul’s use of “*Soter*” points to God as both the preserver of life and the redeemer. This dual emphasis reflects the understanding that God’s salvific work extends beyond physical preservation to eternal life through Christ. Unlike the Ephesian cultic use of “*Soter*” for local gods and emperors, Paul’s use reaffirms God as the true Savior, whose salvation is holistic, embracing both physical life

The Use of *Soter* in the NT

The word “*Soter*,” meaning “savior,” “deliverer,” and “preserver,” occurs 24 times in the New Testament.²⁷ Of these, 16 refer to Christ as the Savior, while the remaining eight refer to God. Ten of these references occur in the Pastoral Epistles.²⁸ In the New Testament, salvation is God’s prerogative. The contexts in which the word occurs will be briefly traced.

“*Soter*” occurs once in the Gospel of Luke and twice in Acts. In Luke 2:10-11 and Acts 5:31 and 7:35, “*Soter*” refers to Christ: His birth as the Savior, His exaltation by God as Prince and Savior, and His power to forgive sins. The immediate context suggests that Christ is primarily the Savior of Israel.²⁹ Besides the references in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul also uses “*Soter*” twice. In Philippians 3:20, the believers are assured that their citizenship is not on earth but in heaven, from where they expect a Savior,

²⁵ See Nock, 2:720-35; Baugh, 334.

²⁶ Lenski, 491.

²⁷ *Soter* is derived from the verb *sozo* and occurs 107 times in the NT. Foerster, “*Sozo, Soteria*,” *TDNT*, 7:965-969; Fohrer, “*Soter* in Later Judaism,” 7:1015; Hendriksen, 156; E. Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1966), 80.

²⁸ See 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Tim 1:10; Titus 1:3; 1:4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6.

²⁹ Liefeld, 4:292, Fohrer, 7:1015-16; Ellis, 80 Scheneider and Brown, 3:219.

the Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 5:23, the relationship between the husband and wife is compared with the relationship between Christ and His Church; Christ is the Savior of the body, or the Church (cf. vv. 25-28).³⁰

The Apostle John uses the term “Savior” twice. In John 4:42, the Samaritans recognize Jesus as the Savior of the world. First John 4:14 testifies that the Father sent the Son as the Savior of the world.³¹ In 2 Peter, *Soter* is commonly used in connection with Jesus (1:1, 11; 2:20; 3:2, 18). Foerster sees no apparent reason for the alternation of the three titles of Jesus: *Theos*, *Kurios*, and *Soter*,³² yet it remains clear that “*Soter*” is a common title for Christ in 2 Peter. This brief survey shows that outside the Pastoral Epistles, “*Soter*” is used in the NT as a title for Jesus and His saving work. Christ is both the Savior of the world and of a specific group of people: Israel, the believers, or the Church.

The Meaning of *Malista* in the NT

Malista is the superlative of the adverb *malla* and is traditionally translated as “particularly,” “especially,” “above all,” “on the other hand,” “most of all,” and “very greatly.” It occurs twelve times in the New Testament (e.g., Acts 20:38; 25:26; 26:3; Galatians 6:10; Philippians 4:22; Philemon 16; 2 Peter 2:10) and is used four times in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy 4:10; 5:8, 17; 2 Timothy 4:13; Titus 1:10).³³

Theodore Cressy Skeat, in his study, proposed that “*malista*,” as used in the NT and 1 Tim 4:10, could be interpreted as “to be precise,” “namely,” or “that is.” He indicates that in the papyrus, “*malista*” is sometimes used to define precisely what precedes it and, therefore, could be interpreted as “that is” or “in other words”³⁴ and thus, it is used not to

³⁰ Foerster, “*Soter*, in the New Testament,” 7:1015-16.

³¹ Ibid, Scheneider and Brown, 3:219.

³² Foerster, “*Soter*, in the New Testament,” 7:1018.

³³ Walter, Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adopted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2nd ed. rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1979), (BAGD) S.v. *Mallista*; Vern Sheridan Poythress, “The Meaning of *Mallista* in II Timothy 4:14 and Related Verses,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 53 (October 2002), 523.

³⁴ Knight, 203. T. C. Skeat’s work on the use and meaning of *mallista* in the NT and the Papyrus has won him recognition as the most authoritative scholar on the use of *mallista* among scholars of the Pastoral Epistles. Theodore Cressy Skeat, “‘Especially the Parchments’: A Note on 2 Timothy IV.13,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 30 (1979): 173-77.

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narrow the meaning of the word but to clarify it. He further points out that the interpretation of 1 Timothy 4:10 should be, "God who gives salvation to all men—that is to say, precisely, to all who believe in Him," based on its usage in the papyri.³⁵ Many scholars agree with Skeat's interpretation, pointing out that this view sounds better because, although God is the potential Savior of all, He is the Savior only to those who accept Him.³⁶

Vern Sheridan Poythress has challenged Skeat's work as unpersuasive; therefore, the traditional understanding of *malista* is correct.³⁷ He also highlights the different meanings and implications of these interpretations and believes the traditional way of interpreting the term should be upheld.

In the Pastoral Epistles, *malista* is found in 1 Timothy 5:8, 17; 2 Timothy 4:13; 1 Timothy 4:10; and Titus 1:10. First Timothy 5:8 points out that "if anyone does not provide for his household, especially his own relatives, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever." Here, one can employ "namely," and it may fit, but the issue at stake is that the emphasis is on the importance of caring for a relative. First Timothy 5:17 specifies the importance of elders who preach and teach over those who seldom do so. If one translates *malista* here as "namely" or "that is," the meaning of the text may be lost. Here, the translation "especially" is better since the idea is to specify or single out some elders for honor.

In 2 Timothy 4:13, Paul instructs Timothy to bring "the scrolls, especially the parchments." Skeat translates it as, "Bring all the books if you can, but if that is not possible, at least make sure to bring the notebooks."³⁸ By following the traditional interpretation, Paul especially needed the parchments or notebooks, and there is nothing in the passage about many books. Another example is Titus 1:10, which reads, "There are many rebellious people, mere talkers, and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group" (NIV). Here, different groups have been mentioned, and he is singling out the importance of the circumcision party. Outside the Pastoral Epistles, we can reference Phlm 16, which reads, "no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me." If we put "namely" or "that is," the statement loses its correct meaning.

³⁵ Skeat, 177. See also Baugh, 333; Mounce, 46:256-57.

³⁶ Skeat, 174-75. See also Baugh, 333; Earle, 11:373.

³⁷ Poythress, 523, 532.

³⁸ Skeat, 173-74.

First Timothy 4:10 has become a theological nightmare due to the interpretation of “especially those who believe,” as rendered by traditional interpreters. However, if the interpretation of Skeat and others is accepted, the text may read, “the living God, who is the Savior of all men, namely, those who believe.” If this translation is accepted, then the passage becomes less controversial. However, the question is: does this interpretation do justice to the context of the passage? Why is Paul using such an ambiguous means to convey his message instead of using the well-known *tout’ estin* (e.g., Eccl 1:17; Acts 1:19; Romans 7:18; 10:6, 7; Hebrews 9:11) if he meant “namely” or “that is”?

As Poythress points out, *tout’ estin* is the Greek equivalent of the English expressions “that is” or “namely.” Therefore, using *malista* with this meaning could be confusing. It would be awkward for Greek speakers to adopt the new definition proposed by modern scholars. Thus, the existence of *tout’ estin* places a heavy burden on Skeat to demonstrate that the proposed new meaning of *malista* is tenable.³⁹

To summarize, as shown, when we insert “namely” or “that is” into some passages where *malista* is found, it may fit, but I would like to raise some questions for consideration. Why can’t Skeat’s interpretation of *malista* be applied to all passages where the term is used, but only to a few selected ones (e.g., 2 Tim 4:13; Tit 1:10, 11; 1 Tim 4:10)? Are we relying on Skeat’s interpretation to prevent Universalists from using this passage to support their point, even at the risk of denying the true meaning of the text? I believe there are various arguments against Universalists rather than this one. Furthermore, this is not the only passage that Universalists depend on. Moreover, why didn’t Paul use the precise Greek phrase for “that is” or “namely” but instead chose *malista*? Based on this argument and the previous study, the traditional interpretation of 1 Tim 4:10, which employs “especially,” may be the correct interpretation for this passage.

The Meaning of *Panton Anthropon*

Another theological issue is the meaning of the phrase “*panton anthropon*” in 1 Timothy 4:10. To help us interpret this passage, we examine its use in the New Testament, especially the Pauline writings.

Panton is derived from the Greek word “pan” (which appears 134 times in the NT) and may mean “all,” “each,” or “the whole.” It has different uses. Sometimes, it is used as an adjective without an article,

³⁹ Poythress, 524 cf. Matt 27:46; Mark 7:2; Acts 1:19; 19:4; Rom 7:18; 9:8; 10:6, 7, 8; Philem 12; Heb 2:14; 7:5; 9:11; 10:20; 11:16; 13:15; 1 Pet 3:20).

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meaning "each," "every," or "any." In such cases, it emphasizes the singular nature of the word or individual members in a group (e.g., Matt 3:10; Luke 3:9; Rom 3:4). When used with a noun in the plural sense without an article, it means "all people or men, every" (e.g., Acts 22:15; Rom 5:12a; I Cor 7:7; 1 Tim 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11). When used with a noun or participle that has a singular article, it means "everyone," "who," or "whoever" (Matt 5:22; Luke 6:47). Furthermore, when used with a plural noun that has an article, it means "all" (Matt 1:17; Luke 1:48).⁴⁰

In the passage under consideration, "*panton*" is used as an adjective in the genitive case and is used in the plural sense with "*anthropon*;" therefore, it is proper to interpret it as "all men" or "every man." The noun "*anthropon*," which is derived from "*Anthropos*" (the generic term for human beings), occurs 99 times in the New Testament (NT), and in this text, it is a genitive plural. "*Anthropon*" and "*panton*" together occur 5 times in the Septuagint (LXX) (Num 16:29; II Macc 7:34; 4 Macc 1:11; Prov 30:2; Sir 44:23) and 6 times in the NT (Rom 12:17, 18; 1 Cor 15:19; 1 Cor 3:2; 1 Tim 2:1; 4:10). In the NT, this combination is found only in Paul's writings.

In Romans 12:17-18, Paul advises the church not to engage in retribution by repaying evil for evil but rather to respect what is right in the sight of all people. He emphasizes that, as far as it depends on you, be at peace with everyone. Here, "everyone" encompasses all humankind. In 1 Corinthians 15:19, the importance of the resurrection comes into view. Paul points out that if Christ has not risen, then the Christian faith is worthless; we are still sinners, and the dead in Christ have perished. Moreover, if we have hope in Christ only in this life, then we are the most miserable among all people. In this passage, the emphasis is also on all humanity.

Furthermore, in 2 Corinthians 3:2, Paul refers to Christians figuratively as a letter written in the hearts of the apostles, known and read by "everyone." Here, too, "everyone" refers to all humanity. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul uses the term "*panton anthropon*" twice in 1 Timothy 2:1 and 4:10. In 1 Timothy 2:1, Paul admonishes that petitions, thanksgivings, and prayers be made for "everyone," and he further explains the composition of "everyone" as kings and all who are in

⁴⁰ F. Graber, "Pas," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol 1, ed., Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 1:94; J. P. Louw and E. A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1988), 589.

authority. The final passage in Paul's use of the phrase "*panton anthropon*" is in our passage of study, 1 Timothy 4:10. It is used in an adjectival sense and refers to all humankind. The difficulty in translating and interpreting this passage lies in understanding what kind of people it addresses. According to Louw and Nida, the word "*panton*" (all), as used in this passage, has different meanings, such as "a totality of kinds or sorts—every kind of, all sorts of."⁴¹ or "a variety of" as found in 1 Timothy 6:10 (all kinds of evil).⁴² This translation may imply that God is the savior of all kinds of people, but the question that arises will be: Who are these kinds of people? How do we define "all kinds of people?"

Barnes points out that God can be considered the Savior of all in two respects. First, He is the Preserver of all people (Job 7:20), which implies that He saves humans from famine, war, and peril, keeping them safe day to day (Ps 107:28). Furthermore, God has made provision for everyone to be saved; therefore, He is the Savior of all, but this requires faith and trust in His Word.⁴³ Furthermore, those who adhere to the concept of limited atonement argue that "all men" in 1 Timothy 4:10 implies "all kinds" or "all groups" of people and that salvation is not only for the Jews, but also for Gentiles.⁴⁴ Accordingly, "all groups of people," including Jews and Gentiles, will be saved; however, this does not mean all of humanity. John Calvin believes that it refers to God's common grace, which relates to God's care and benevolence towards all people (cf. Ps 145:9; Matt 5:45; Acts 14:16-17).⁴⁵

The Pastoral Epistles clearly indicates that God's provision of grace (1 Tim 2:2, 4) for everyone's salvation is available (1:1). However, only those who believe in and accept this provision will be saved (John 3:17, 18, 36; cf. 1:12).⁴⁶ Furthermore, Towner points out that 4:10 should be understood in the context of 2:4: "who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." He further states, "God's universal salvific will is realized 'particularly' through the proclamation of and belief in the Gospel."⁴⁷ Without a belief in the gospel that Paul has been

⁴¹ Louw and Nida, 589, sec 58.28; see also Baugh, 333.

⁴² See Matt 4:23 and 1 Cor 6:18.

⁴³ Wuest, 2:72.

⁴⁴ Mounce, 46:256.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 46:257.

⁴⁶ "All Men" (1 Tim 4:10), *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)* rev. ed., ed Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1957), 7:305.

⁴⁷ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 312.

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preaching, one cannot experience salvation. As stated in 4:8, godliness is a prerequisite for life hereafter.

Therefore, if one is not godly, one cannot experience salvation. Here, Paul links his ministry, godliness, and salvation to denounce the extreme exclusivist claims and ascetic rigors of heresy.⁴⁸ Thus, when Paul says that God is the Savior of “all men,” especially those who believe, he points out that God desires to save all humanity. However, in harmony with the Scriptures, only those who believe will be saved (John 3:16; 2:4; 4:3).

Translation of 1 Timothy 4:10

Having studied keywords in 1 Timothy 4:10, we need to translate the text. There are actually textual variants for 1 Timothy 4:10. For instance, in some texts, the coordinating conjunction “*kai*” appears twice after “*gar*.” However, the main intent of the text is preserved. The Greek and English translations of the passage may be as follows:

The Greek text of 1 Timothy 4:10 is: *εἰς τοῦτο γὰρ κοπιῶμεν καὶ ἀγωνιζόμεθα, ὅτι ἠλπίκαμεν ἐπὶ θεῷ ζῶντι, ὃς ἐστὶν σωτὴρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων, μάλιστα πιστῶν.*

A literal translation of this passage into English would be: “*For to this end, we toil and strive because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all people (men), especially of believers.*”

In this translation:

- *Εἰς τοῦτο* — “For this” or “To this end”
- *Κοπιῶμεν* — “We toil” or “We labor”
- *ἀγωνιζόμεθα* — “We strive” or “We struggle”
- *ἠλπίκαμεν* — “We have hoped” or “We have set our hope.”
- *ἐπὶ θεῷ ζῶντι* — “On the living God”
- *ὃς ἐστὶν* — “Who is”
- *σωτὴρ* — “Savior”
- *πάντων ἀνθρώπων* — “Of all people”
- *μάλιστα* — “Especially”
- *πιστῶν* — “Of believers” or “Of the faithful”

This translation closely retains the structure and nuances of the Greek while ensuring the English is coherent.

⁴⁸ Ibid. See also J. M. Bassler, *1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 85.

**Literary Analysis and Interpretation
of 1 Tim 4:10**

This section brings the investigation done so far to bear on 1 Timothy 4:10. It also highlights the theological significance of the text. This passage is preceded by a faithful saying of Paul in verse 9. In all its occurrences, it precedes and authenticates a statement considered gnomic in early Christian traditions. For example, 1 Timothy 1:5 reads, “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst” (NIV). Similarly, the statement in 4:10 is true according to verse 9.

In v. 10a, Paul says, “For this reason, we labor and strive.” In the NT, *eis touto*, meaning “for this reason.” It is a common expression that usually points to a previous statement (Mark 1:38; 1 Thess 3:3; 1 Pet 2:21) or an upcoming discussion (John 18:37; Acts 9:21; 26:16; Rom 14:9; 2 Cor 2:29; 1 Pet 3:9). In 1 Tim 4:1-5, Paul argues against false teachers who forbid marriage and strongly encourage abstaining from certain foods. Paul urges Timothy to remind the Church of these false teachings that will arise in later times, as the Spirit has said. If Timothy does this, he will be a good minister of Jesus “in the words of faith and of good doctrine that you have followed” (v. 6 NIV). Paul continues admonishing Timothy to refuse godless myths but to train himself to be godly (v. 7). Verse 8 places more value on godliness as being profitable in all things than on physical training⁴⁹ because it promises benefits for both this life and the next. The promise nuances salvation as both present and future (eschatological) for the righteous.⁵⁰ Verse 10 shares familiar imagery with verse 8, such as pursuing godliness.⁵¹

Guthrie observes that “the subject matter of verse 10 is more theologically weighty than verse 8 and would therefore be admirably adapted for correct catechetical purposes.”⁵² For this reason, Paul indicates

⁴⁹ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1964), 113; Barth Campbell, “Rhetorical Design in 1 Timothy 4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 154 (April-June 1997): 198; Knight, 197.

⁵⁰ Earle, 11:373; Mounce, 46:254.

⁵¹ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. 5, *The Epistles of Paul* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1931), 580.

⁵² Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 96.

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that they are laboring and striving⁵³ because they have hoped in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, above all, the faithful.

Mounce contends that *eis touto* is used here to look forward to why Paul and Timothy toil; their hope is in the living God.⁵⁴ Lenski appears to agree, indicating that the usage here does not refer to the masculine logos but should be interpreted as “this thing,” which refers to Paul’s statements. Paul suggests that they are “toiling and straining.”⁵⁵ They act like athletes in their effort to spread true godliness among people while preserving it from the influence of present and future errors (v. 7 cf. 1-2). Using the present tense for both verbs suggests ongoing action on their part, and the effort is unceasing.⁵⁶

In the Pastoral Epistles, “*kopiomen*” is employed to describe the labor of elders (1 Tim 5:17) and farmers (2 Tim 2:6). Paul typically uses this term to refer to the work of Christians (e.g., Rom 16:6, 12; 1 Cor 16:16; 1 Thess 5:12), depicting hard work. In this context, it points to the labor and toil that Church leaders often endure (1 Cor 15:10; 16:16; Gal 4:11; Col 1:29; 1 Thess 5:12). The primary reason Paul labors so much is that God is the Savior of all men. Mounce indicates that this verb (“*kopiomen*”) and what follows is characterized by a “linear aspect,” emphasizing day-to-day labor. “*Kopian*,” meaning to toil, is also used in Phil 2:16 as an athletic metaphor; perhaps its use here is intended to continue that metaphor from vv. 7-8.⁵⁷ Therefore, the word “*kopiomen*,” as used in this passage, has an athletic undertone and indicates the toil Christians endure to spread the Gospel. The use of “we” refers to Paul and Timothy. The reason both work together and strain themselves is that *we have placed our hope in the living God* (cf. Col 1:24-29). The word “*elpizein*,” meaning “to hope,” indicates that the believers’ hope will eventually be actualized. In 5:5, the same word is referenced concerning widows who have placed their hope in God, and in 6:17, it serves as a warning to the rich not to put their hope in their wealth but in God. In 3:14 is used non-theologically to express Paul’s

⁵³ Also see 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Col 1:29; 4:12; Phil 1:30. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Contextual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 2002), 641-42; Knight, 202.

⁵⁴ Mounce, 46:254, 246.

⁵⁵ Also see 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7; Col 1:29; 4:12; Phil 1:30. See Metzger, 641-42.

⁵⁶ Lenski, 637; Earle, 11:373; Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin Jr., *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34, eds., E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1991), 136.

⁵⁷ Mounce, 46:254-55. See also F. Hauck, “*Kopos, Kopiao*,” *TDNT*, 3:827-30.

desire to see Timothy soon.⁵⁸ It also matches the word “promise” used in 4:8. Only the living God can keep His promises, in which we hope.⁵⁹

The phrase “*Theo zonti*,” meaning “living God,” occurs six times in the New Testament (Rom 9:29; 2 Cor 3:3; 6:16; 1 Thess 1:9; 1 Tim 3:15; 4:10). It is typically used to contrast God with other idols (1 Tim 1:9). This contrast is evident in the Old Testament, where the phrase is often used to distinguish between those who believe in God and pagans (e.g., 1 Sam 17:26, 36; Isa 37:4, 17; Dan 6:25-27).⁶⁰ It serves as an affirmation of Paul’s confident hope in the living God, who will accomplish all His plans.⁶¹

After encouraging everyone to have faith in God, Paul used a relative clause that calls everyone to hope in “He who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.” When we compare the use of “all” in 2:4 with its usage here, it is evident that both usages are stronger than appositions.⁶² According to Louw and Nida, the word “*panton*” (all), as used in this passage, is an adjective. This usage has different meanings, such as “a totality of kinds or sorts—every kind of, all sorts of”⁶³ or “a variety of” as found in 1 Tim 6:10 (all kinds of evil).⁶⁴ As discussed above, it implies all of humanity. God desires that all people be saved, and in the larger context of the Scriptures, it refers to those who believe in Christ Jesus.

Scriptural Integration on the Concept of God as “Savior”

In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul’s designation of God as “Savior of all men” preserves continuity with Old Testament depictions of God as both Redeemer and Protector. In the Psalms, for example, God is repeatedly portrayed as the Savior who delivers His people from both spiritual and physical peril: “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” (Psalm 27:1, NIV). Similarly, Isaiah emphasizes God’s role as the ultimate deliverer, stating, “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid” (Isaiah 12:2). These passages reflect a biblical pattern where God’s salvific work spans immediate deliverance and future eschatological hope.

Paul builds on this foundation in the New Testament by associating salvation with Jesus Christ’s atoning sacrifice, accessible through faith

⁵⁸ Mounce, 46:256.

⁵⁹ Lenski, 637; Mounce, 46:256.

⁶⁰ See Baugh, 337.

⁶¹ Mounce, 46:256.

⁶² Lenski, 639.

⁶³ Louw and Nida, 589, sec 58.28; see also Baugh, 333.

⁶⁴ See Matt 4:23 and 1 Cor 6:18.

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(Ephesians 2:8-9). Paul’s soteriology thus maintains the Old Testament themes of deliverance while incorporating a new dimension—salvation through Christ’s redemptive work. Thus, God’s role as Savior is both a present reality and a future promise, underscoring that while God preserves all humanity (generally), salvation’s fullness is realized only through faith in Jesus.⁶⁵

A canonical review of soteriology shows that God’s redemptive work is a recurring theme, starting in the Old Testament and reaching its peak in the New Testament. The Old Testament establishes a foundation, depicting God as a “Savior” who rescues His people and offers grace to all of creation (e.g., Psalm 36:6; Jonah 4:11). This wide-ranging preservation anticipates the New Testament’s emphasis on salvation through Christ, who represents both a culmination of these themes and an expansion of their meaning.

In 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul encapsulates this continuity by identifying God as the Savior for “all men” but “especially for those who believe.” This choice of words suggests that while God’s grace and preservation apply to everyone, true salvation is attained solely through faith. Therefore, God’s saving work includes general care for all humanity along with exclusive, eternal salvation for believers. This perspective underscores the connections throughout the biblical canon, highlighting the necessity of personally accepting Christ.

Summary and Conclusions

As previously mentioned, the interpretation of “the Savior of all men” has sparked considerable debate. In 1 Timothy 4:10, “Savior” is used as a noun in an anarthrous form, indicating it is “not a title for God but rather a description of His actions. He is regarded as ‘a Savior of all people’” because He fulfills the role of a Savior for everyone.”⁶⁶ The passage indicates that God is the Savior of all people, especially believers. In other

⁶⁵ For references and source material, please consult the following sources. George R. Knight, *A Search for Identity: The Development of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 162; Raoul Dederen, “The Doctrine of Salvation,” in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, ed. Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 224-225; Richard Rice, *God’s Love, and God’s Law: A Theological Introduction to the Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985), 34-35; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1911), 480-481.

⁶⁶ Baugh, 332. See also C. F. D. Motile, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1960), 114; Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 203.

words, Jesus saved humanity through his atoning sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. By this, He justified all human beings, making them potential candidates for salvation. Furthermore, 1 Timothy 4:9-10 is a trustworthy statement from Paul, confirming that godliness holds higher value for both present and future life, granted by God who saves all people, especially those who believe.

The exploration progressed to the term “*soter*” in the LXX, Greek literature, and the NT, along with the interpretation of “*malista*” in the NT. The research also delved into “*panton anthropon*” within the NT. In the LXX, God serves as the “*Soter*,” delivering salvation not only in a historical context but also offering pathways to eschatological redemption. In the Greek context, “*Soter*” can refer to gods, earthly rulers, or divinized humans. The NT’s application of “*Soter*” parallels its usage in the LXX, as both God and Christ are addressed as *Soter*. Notably, God, the “*Soter*,” delivers salvation to the world through another “*Soter*,” Jesus Christ.

It has been shown that the antecedent of *eis touto*, “for this reason,” in 4:10, is verse 8, which refers to godliness and its value. This is supported by the fact that verse 10 shares familiar imagery with verse 8, such as the pursuit of godliness. Accordingly, Paul and Timothy labored and strove because they hoped in the living God, the Savior of all men, especially the faithful. The concept of salvation in 1 and 2 Timothy has two dimensions: general salvation, extended to all sinners, and specific salvation, which is for believers. The superlative *malista* may be used in the sense of either importance or specification, depending on the context. Based on examples of the use of *malista* in 1 Timothy and the logical flow of thought in 4:8-10, it has been argued that its use in verse 10 seems to emphasize the fact that, while God can save everyone, He actually saves the faithful since they believe in Christ. Therefore, 1 Timothy 4:10 affirms God’s universal grace and individual accountability. While this interpretation is not new, this study has provided additional arguments to support the view that God is the potential Savior of all men, particularly those who accept Him as their personal Savior.

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