

Salvation of the Individual as Promised in the Old Testament
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Salvation and Faith

Scriptural salvation¹ leading to eternal life has *always* been linked to the faith (belief and trust) of an individual. The question immediately arises, “Faith in what?” Is faith linked to obedience or righteous acts (good works, sacraments) in part or is it wholly separate. The Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, makes the case for the separation of these very important aspects of salvation in the book of Romans that has application to the Old Testament as well. He clearly states that salvation is not tied to works (e.g. sacrifice of animals). His pronouncement plainly connects salvation to faith only and by correlating the salvation of Scriptural giants before and after the giving of the Law at Sinai.

For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Romans 4:2-6 (cf. Rom. 11:6; Gal. 2:16; 3:2; Eph. 2:7-10, Heb. 11:6) [HDW, my emphasis]

The book of Hebrews clearly states the requirement of faith. It has application to all dispensations, and in the context of the passage, the author is speaking about the giants of the faith in the Old Testament.

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. Hebrews 11:6

¹ Cognates of the words salvation, saved, keep from, helped, etc occur well over 500 times in the Scriptures. They have a wide range of use. In this work, those passages which save us from this evil world and transport us into the presence of the Lord for ever, whether in this life or the one to come are indicated by salvation or saved. The Hebrew word or cognates generally indicated are yasha and yeshuwah (Strong’s 3467 and 3444) and Greek soteria and sozo (Strong’s 4991 and 4982).

And for those who would claim that the giving of the law at Sinai changed this aspect of salvation for individual Old Testament saints, Paul trounces the thought in the book of Galatians saying,

And this I say, *that* the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. Galatians 3:17 [HDW, my emphasis]

Salvation and Christ

Salvation is made possible by “God in Christ,” who only was able to fulfill the requirement to be the Lamb of God, because all men have sinned and “fall short of the glory of God” (Isa. 53:6; Rom 3:23). The only exception is Him, who is without spot or blemish and is blameless (Heb. 9:14, 1 Pe. 1:19). The Lord Jesus Christ is without sin, but was made sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) in order to completely satisfy the judgment of a perfectly just God who demands perfect justice. Only God’s Son could perfectly fill the position of Saviour. The Old Testament saints looked forward to the Cross and the New Testament saints look back at the Cross. No one will ever understand completely the depth of what was accomplished by “God in Christ” on the Cross in this lifetime. We see through a glass darkly. Only when we are on the other side and see Him as He is will we have a better understanding, but even there we will be amazed.

Salvation and Modern Theories

The need to address the question of salvation in the Old Testament, the tribulation, or the millennium arises because of exegetes who wish to deductively apply their reasoning to their pet theories about (1) the timing of end time events, (2) covenant theology versus dispensationalism, (3) who the restrainer is (2 Thess. 2:7), (4) what the removal of the “restrainer” means to salvation, (5) and the work of the Holy Spirit before and after Pentecost. Basically, the opposition by many exegetes of Scripture is to press

those who interpret the Scriptures literally, inductively and dispensationally. For example, Pentecost says,

A field of investigation opened by the view that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer who is to be removed is the question of salvation during the tribulation period. One of the questions most frequently raised by those antagonistic to the dispensational premillennial position is that very question...With this position [of questioning salvation] the posttribulation rapturist is in full agreement"² [HDW, my emphasis and addition]

Many influences upon the modern theologian cause unwarranted and unnecessary confusion, particularly evolutionary ideas. Dr. Walvoord said,

The revelation of the plan of God in salvation in the Old Testament has occasioned no little dispute as to its exact character. Modernists in theology have attempted to conform the revelation of the Old Testament to an evolutionary pattern which tends to eliminate any revelation of the love and mercy of God until late in the Old Testament. On the other hand conservative theologians have pointed out the evident mercies of God from Genesis to Malachi. Confusion has also arisen on a number of other important points. The problem of interpreting the Old Testament without undue influence from later revelation in the New Testament continues to plague the student of Old Testament theology. One of the major difficulties in the discussion of the Old Testament doctrine of salvation is that modernism and evolution have invaded Old Testament teachings relentlessly. If the primary religion of early man was polytheistic, animistic or reduced to a fetishism and totemism, obviously we shall look in vain for any true revelation of salvation. On the contrary, the Scriptures are explicit that from Adam and Eve down there was a definite primary revelation of true salvation of God. Only by denying the accuracy of Scripture can any other view be supported. It is rather curious that the modernist after declaring as spurious or interpolated the portions of early Scripture which oppose the evolutionary theory then turns to what is left of the Scripture for evidence of his own view.³ [HDW, my emphasis]

Salvation and the Cross

In summary from the preceding material, one must conclude that faith is necessary, but was knowledge of the Cross necessary? The answer is found in Genesis, "in the beginning." The proto-evangelicum (Gen. 3:15) clearly indicates the need for the Saviour because of the sin of man, which occurred secondarily to the influence of Satan (not primarily, for man must carry responsibility). God says to the serpent:

² J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come, A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Academie Books, Grand Rapids, MI, First Printing, 1964, 1993 printing) 263, 264.

³ John F. Walvoord, "Series in Christology—Part 4, The Preincarnate Son of God" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 104:416 (Dallas Theological Seminary, Oct. 1947) 419-420.

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” **Genesis 3:15**

Phillip Grossman wrote about the Jewish anticipation of the Cross. He said.

A word might be said concerning the book of Job, perhaps the oldest writing in the Bible, wherein the patriarch appears to have had some revelation concerning eternal salvation (19:25–27). Nor should we overlook the early promise of a Deliverer given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:15. But in each of these cases we search in vain for any information that the promised One would die for the sins of the world⁴

It is preposterous to think that the Old Testaments saints were ignorant, and that some understanding of the future satisfactory sacrifice by Christ was not understood by them. Did many understand? Of course not, just as most do not understand the necessity of the Cross related to propitiation, and consider it only a moral compass or influence.⁵ Consider the nearly accomplished sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham (Gen. 22:8). Surely “something” would be learned from “God will provide Himself a lamb.” Surely the Old Testament saints understood “something” because of the enormous numbers of animals sacrificed. Surely, they looked forward to a time of atonement and redemption, not only the one day of atonement per year, but to the time when the Lord “will provide Himself a lamb.” Could the Lord Jesus Christ’s cry on the Cross, “It is finished” have something to do with the Jew’s knowledge that a future “work” was to be done for salvation (i.e. “God will provide Himself a lamb,” associated with the time when Satan “bruised his heel”)? The man of God meditates on His word “day and night” (Psa. 1:2), then as now.

The age of grace believer understands that the descriptions of the tribulation, the millennium, and heaven in the Scriptures are a shadow of “things to come.” The believers

⁴Phillip W. Grossman, “Jewish Anticipation of the Cross,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 106:422 (Dallas Theological Seminary, January, 1949) 246.

⁵H. D. Williams, M.D., *The Lie that Changed the Modern World* (Bible For Today Press, Collingswood, NJ, 2004) 61. This is called the moral influence theory versus the orthodox satisfaction theory of the atonement.

in the nation of Israel understood that the ordinances instituted by God were also a shadow of “things to come.”

It is thus evident that the salvation offered in the Old Testament was an individual salvation, accepted by faith, based on blood sacrifice, which sacrifices were the foreshadows of the true sacrifice to come. This salvation was presented as an inheritance, to be received at a future time, rather than as a present possession. The individual Israelite who believed God was truly saved, but awaited a future experience of the fullness of that salvation. Chafer, on this point says: “By the presentation of a sacrifice and by the placing of the hand upon the head of the victim, the offender acknowledged his sin before God and entered intelligently into an arrangement in which a substitute died in the sinner’s place. Though, as stated in Hebrews 10:4—‘It is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats should take away sins’—God did, nevertheless, provide a release for the offender, but with the expectation on His own part that a righteous ground for such release would eventually be secured by the one sacrificial death of the death of His Son, which death the animal-slaying typified... In Romans 3:25 the divine objective in the death of Christ is declared to be, ‘for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.’” Thus was the individual offered a salvation.⁶

Salvation and the Goel

Salvation is the entire concept behind the “goel” or kinsman redeemer in the book of Ruth (i.e. Boaz who is typologically a type of Christ, Ruth 3:9), and of Job’s redeemer (Job 19:25, גֹּאֵל ga'al). Who could read Hannah’s song and not suspect how much she understood (1 Sam. 2:1-10, particularly v. 6, 10)? Those in the Old Testament who loved His words must have mused upon the salvation provided by the serpent “lifted up” upon a pole (Nu. 21:9, Jn. 3:14). Could it have been constructed like a cross? And what about David’s understanding of His Lord (Psa. 110:1)? He recorded some of the greatest prophecies concerning the suffering servant, His Lord. Walvoord writes,

Secondly, God spoke directly to David in a way He spoke to no other. As Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer writes, “To David were given two important revelations, namely, (a) that God’s eternal Son would die a sacrificial death (Ps 22:1–21; 69:20–21), and (b) that He would occupy David’s throne forever (2 Sam 7:16–29; Ps 89:34–37).⁷

⁶J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Nature of Salvation in the Old Testament* (Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 115:457, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1958; 2002) 52-53

⁷Phillip W. Grossman, *Jewish Anticipation of the Cross* (Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 106:422, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1949; 2002) 245

And what about Peter's confession that he gave concerning the prophets of the Old Testament, saying:

Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace *that should come* unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into. 1 Peter 1:10-12 [HDW, my emphasis]

Truly, the "picture" presented by the animal sacrifices would not be as clear to the Old Testament saints as it is to the present age looking back. However, it is similar to an individual looking at a picture of the Grand Canyon as opposed to standing on the edge of it. The full appreciation for the Canyon cannot be experienced before standing on the edge and peering over. Many of us did not expect to see the roaring Colorado River at the base, and many did not expect that a "suffering servant," the Lord of glory, would hang on a tree (Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13). Similarly, we know the Scripture passages about the Great Tribulation, but the experience of it in the near future will certainly far surpass hearing about it from preaching or reading about it in Scripture.

Salvation and Israel's 'Covenant'

Finally, the individual in the nation of Israel in the Old Testament depended on a covenant that is often overlooked. It is a covenant "beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb" (Deut. 29:1). God indicates the type of covenant He is making with thee (notice the number of singular words in Deut. 29ff), and "with him that is not here with us this day" (Deut. 29:15). The commandment is to obey "the voice of the Lord thy God" (Deut. 30:10), who is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (i.e. the 'voice' that gives the Words of God). The voice repeatedly commands individuals to believe on Him, the "Voice," throughout the Old and New Testaments (Ex. 23:20-22; Deut. 13:18; Psa 19;

Psa. 81:11-12; Psa 103:20; Isa 43:10; Jn. 5:25; Rev. 3:20; etc.). We are commanded to “hear ye him” (Mat. 17:5) for “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

Salvation and the Holy Spirit

The work of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages must be considered. Some theologians seem to think that the Spirit’s work of salvation is different during the dispensation of grace as a result of indwelling the believer. Pentecost addresses this important question in a poignant statement about the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the tribulation. It will help clarify salvation in all ages.

“The means of salvation. Allis asks the question: “The difficult question raised by this Dispensational doctrine is obviously this, How does this great body...of redeemed ones come into being? According to Darby and Scofield the entire church has then been raptured, the Holy Spirit, whom they hold to be the one ‘that restraineth’ (2 Thess ii.6), has been taken away. How then will the saints of the tribulation period be saved.” There are several things to be noted about this question. While we agree that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit, and that He will be taken away, yet we must recognize that the Spirit is omnipresent. He will cease His particular ministry of indwelling the body of Christ, but that does not mean He will be inoperative. Before Pentecost the Lord told Nicodemus that a man must be born again by the Spirit (John 3:5–6). If a person could experience a new birth before the Holy Spirit began to indwell the body, certainly one could be after He ceases that particular ministry. It should be noted that the indwelling ministry is related to the enablement of believers in their Christian walk, not to the method or means of salvation.”⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, Lewis Sperry Chafer and Pentecost summarize the salvation of individuals in the Old Testament dispensations saying:

“A very clear and comprehensive body of Scripture bears on eternal life as related to Judaism. However, it is there contemplated as an inheritance. The doctrine as related to Judaism is found in will-identified passages: (a) Isaiah 55:3 (cf. Deut. 30:6), in which context the prophet is calling on a covenant people to enter fully into blessing which Jehovah’s covenants secure. In the midst of these is this promise that “your soul shall live.” (b) Daniel 12:2, where the context,...relates to the resurrection

⁸ J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Godly Remnant in the Tribulation* (Bibliotheca Sacra Volume 117:466, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1960; 2002) 130

of those who are of Judaism; some of these are to be raised to “everlasting life,” and some to “everlasting contempt.”⁹

Because those that are “wise” (Dan. 12:3) and hear His Voice will be saved through faith.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9

Pentecost says (repeating what is quoted above):

It is thus evident that the salvation offered in the Old Testament was an individual salvation, accepted by faith, based on blood sacrifice, which sacrifices were the foreshadows of the true sacrifice to come. The salvation was presented as an inheritance, to be received at a future time, rather than as a present possession. The individual Israelite who believed God was truly saved, but awaited a future experience of the fullness of that salvation.”¹⁰ [HDW, my emphasis]

And truly, the saints of this age also wait on a “future experience of the fullness of” our salvation when we will be with Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen!

⁹ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology* (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1948, 1976, Vol. I – VII) Vol IV, 25.

¹⁰ J. Dwight Pentecost, op. cit., 265 (TTC).