

Theology 404, Soteriology
Dallas Theological Seminary

Salvation in the Old Testament

At this point in the course we have established that mankind is in great need of salvation and that we cannot save ourselves. All are guilty of sin and deserving of eternal condemnation apart from God's gracious intervention. We have also introduced the concepts of divine providence and election, which may be seen clearly throughout the Bible. Our focus in this lesson shifts to the nature of salvation itself, which will be examined progressively, beginning in the Old Testament.

The Nature of Progressive Revelation

When considering the topic of salvation in the Old Testament, it is vital that we recognize the concept of progressive revelation. Ryrie describes this as "the recognition that God's message to man was not given in one single act but was unfolded in a long series of successive acts and through the minds and hands of many men of varying backgrounds."¹ Ramm rightly emphasizes the importance of this concept when he says,

This perspective of progressive revelation is very important to the interpreter. He will expect the full revelation of God in the New Testament. He will not force New Testament meanings into the Old, yet he will be able to more fully expound the Old knowing its counterparts in the New. He will adjust his sights to the times, customs, manners, and morals of the people of God at any given state in the Old Testament period of revelation, and he will be aware of the partial and elementary nature of the Old Testament revelation.²

The fact that the Bible contains the progressive development (or unveiling) of principles without contradiction means that we must be careful not to read any of our more fully developed beliefs into the Old Testament literature, for that would corrupt the inerrant text of Scripture. We must allow the Scripture to speak for itself (a principle that is easier to recommend than to practice).

What this means for the topic of salvation in the Old Testament is that we should not assume that God's people have always been fully aware of eternal judgment, the sufferings of Jesus Christ, or the nature of justification by faith.³ Their focus was on life and deliverance from death, and they had faith in the God whom they knew to be sovereign over all.

¹Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 33.

²Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 103-4.

³Even those who focus exclusively on Old Testament soteriology may make this mistake, as T. V. Farris seems to in *Mighty to Save: A Study in Old Testament Soteriology* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1993). He does not mention the role of sacrifices except to describe the manner in which the Day of Atonement foreshadowed the coming of Christ, and his discussion of the law focuses on the individual's inability to obey its commands. These are legitimate points, to be sure, but they do not necessarily reflect the emphasis of the OT text itself or the perspective of the OT believer.

The Blessing of God: Life in the Land

Human life has always been conditioned upon the will of God, the Creator. He gave life to Adam through His Breath, and promised that sin would bring death, which it did.⁴ The wickedness of mankind brought about the near-universal destruction of the race in the Flood, and only Noah and his family were spared, having "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8).

The Lord promised Abraham that he would become a great nation, enjoying and providing the blessing of God while living in the land of Canaan (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:18). Though he did not personally experience the fullness of the promised land, Abraham did enjoy a long life that demonstrated the presence of God's blessing. Genesis 25:8 reads, "And Abraham breathed his last and died in a ripe old age, an old man and satisfied with life; and he was gathered to his people."

From an Israelite perspective, a natural death at the end of a long and satisfying life was not thought of as punishment, but as a great reward (Gen. 35:29; Ex. 20:12; Jud. 8:32; Ps. 21:4; 91:16). In contrast, an early death or death in exile represented God's punishment (Ps. 102:23; Is. 65:20; Deut. 28:58-68). In Genesis 46:30, Jacob said that he was ready to die after seeing Joseph alive. He was satisfied, and he regarded his life as complete. However, when he believed Joseph to be dead, he anticipated that his own death would be a bitter one as a result (Gen. 37:35). Similarly, Number 16 records several examples of premature death which came through the judgment of God. In verses 29 and 30, Moses indicates that this was the only kind of death that would be interpreted as the judgment of God.⁵ The thought of a premature death was abhorrent to the righteous Israelite, who feared being cut off from his people and from the worship of His God (Ps. 88).

God's blessing was manifested in a long and satisfying life in the land of promise, and His judgment was manifested in premature death or death in exile. Though Israel would always retain the promise of the land because of God's one-sided covenant with Abraham (Gen. 17:8), God gave them an opportunity to choose between life and death, blessing and cursing on the basis of the Mosaic covenant. This is stated clearly in Deuteronomy 30:15-20, which reads,

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and his statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You shall not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.

This passage, which has been called the clearest expression of the Israelite view of life,⁶ demonstrates that life in the land is contingent upon Israel's faithfulness to God's commands.⁷

⁴ Gen. 2:7, 17; 3:19; 5. (Cf. the notes on the nature of sinfulness and the fall of humanity.)

⁵Cf. *NIDNTT*, s.v. "Death," by Walter Schmithals, 1:433.

⁶*NIDNTT*, s.v. "Life," by Hans-Georg Link, 2:478.

Israel would enjoy a prosperous physical life through obedience, but death and exile would result from disobedience.

The conditional blessing which the covenant offered to the nation as a corporate unit was also applied on an individual basis (Deut. 29:18-21). Each person in the nation could expect the blessing of a long and prosperous life in the land through the maintenance of a right relationship with God under the covenant.

The Function of the Law

Under the Mosaic covenant, the Law served as the means by which God's people could demonstrate and express their allegiance to Him. Deuteronomy 30:20 associates obedience with "loving the Lord your God" and "holding fast to Him." Elsewhere God pledges to bring punishment against those who "hate" Him in their disobedience while promising blessing upon those who "love" Him and keep His commandments (Deut. 5:9,10). Because obedience to the Law led to a long life of blessing (Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 6:24; 8:1-3; 16:20), the Law itself was regarded as a source of life (Deut. 32:47). Similarly, wise sayings and wisdom itself came to be viewed as the pathway to life.⁸

As the means by which national life was preserved under the covenant, the Law was used by God to maintain Israel's presence as a distinctive nation in a hostile environment. This helped prepare the way for the promised Messiah, whose sacrifice would bring an end to the expectation of the Law (Gal. 3:19-22; Matt. 5:17).

What this means is that the Law was never intended to be the means by which one would obtain eternal salvation (Gal. 2:21). In retrospect, its purposes may be summed up in several ways.

The Law had a regulatory purpose in that it was given to make Israel a holy nation, distinct from Gentile nations in her relationship to God and in her behavior (Ex. 19:5-6; 31:16-17; Deut 4:20; 7:6). The gods of the surrounding nations were as wicked as the people, so there was no holy standard to be maintained with their rituals. Only Israel had a God who could say, "Be ye holy, as I am holy."

⁷Cf. Lionel Swain, "The Bible and the People: Eternal Life in the Old Testament," *Clergy Review* 52 (1967): 105-7.

⁸In Proverbs, life is seen as a reward for wise and obedient behavior (Prov. 2:19-22; 3:2; 7:23; 9:6-11; 10:2,16; 11:4,19; 12:28; 13:14; 14:27,32; 15:24; 19:23; 21:21; 22:4; 23:13,14; 24:14). Conversely, death is the consequence of folly and disobedience (2:18; 5:5; 7:27; 8:36; 10:21; 14:12,32; 16:25; 21:6). Just as God's word is a source of life (3:22), so is wisdom seen as the tree of life, readily available to all (3:18; 8:35). Wisdom sayings are regarded as leading to life (4:4,10,13,22; 6:23; 7:2; 10:11,17; 13:124; 15:31). Interestingly, von Rad suggests that this may be the reason why the creation and fall of Adam and Eve is not more critical to the rest of the Old Testament. He writes, "The Word of God sets [the Israelite] in the decision between life and death. And this belief is so strongly developed that the primitive story and its statement regarding the impartation of life are almost emptied of significance. For the implanting of life at creation is far less important for those who know that its actual attainment or loss depends solely on the Word of God, so that there is constant need of the blessing of life" (*TDNT*, s.v. "zavw," by Gerhard von Rad, 2:844-45).

It had a revelatory purpose in that it revealed God's moral character and revealed sin to be sin (Lev. 11, 19, 20; Rom. 3:19-20).

Finally, it had a dispensational purpose in that it prepared the way for Christ to come at the fulness of time (Gal. 3:24; Eph. 1:10). In this way the sacrifices of the Old Testament helped demonstrate the need for a Savior who would offer sacrifice once for all (Heb. 10).

The Nature and Necessity of Sacrifice

The function of sacrifices is discussed quite thoroughly in the Law, but the principle seems to have been well established long before Moses. It may go all the way back to the Fall, when God made clothes out of animal skins for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21).⁹ Though Kidner regards this as "unduly subtle,"¹⁰ Marcus Dods seems to make a legitimate point when he writes,

It is also to be remarked that the clothing which God provided was in itself different from what man had thought of. Adam took leaves from an inanimate, unfeeling tree; God deprived an animal of life, that the shame of His creature might be relieved. This was the last thing Adam would have thought of doing. To us life is cheap and death familiar, but Adam recognized death as the punishment of sin. Death was to early man a sign of God's anger. And he had to learn that sin could be covered not by a bunch of leaves snatched from a bush as he passed by and that would grow again next year, but only by pain and blood. Sin cannot be atoned for by any mechanical action nor without expenditure of feeling. Suffering must ever follow wrongdoing. From the first sin to the last, the track of the sinner is marked with blood. Once we have sinned we cannot regain permanent peace of conscience save through pain, and this not only pain of our own. The first hint of this was given as soon as conscience was aroused in man. It was made apparent that sin was a real and deep evil, and that by no easy and cheap process could the sinner be restored.¹¹

In this same way, the blood sacrifices of the Mosaic law clearly demonstrated the effects of sin. As the blood of the animal (the visible representation of life) was poured out, its death graphically represented sin's penalty for the worshiper who remained alive only by the grace of God. Leviticus 17:11 states, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement."

The sacrificial system is described in detail in Leviticus 1-7. Several different types of sacrifices may be identified:

⁹Established sacrificial practices were evidently in place by the time Adam's sons brought their offerings to the Lord in Genesis 4. The Lord "had regard" for Abel's offering (v. 4), but not for Cain's (v. 5). The distinction between the two was probably not based on the type of offering (blood vs. grain), but on the attitude with which the offering was made (Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 157; Bruce K. Waltke, "Cain and His Offering," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (1986): 363-72). In any case, both blood and grain offerings were clearly given to the Lord long before the Law, and any divine instruction concerning the nature of those sacrifices has not been retained. (Cf. Genesis 8:20-21; 12; 15; 22.)

¹⁰Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, 72.

¹¹Marcus Dods, *The Book of Genesis*, 25-26, cited by Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 149.

1. Burnt offering (Lev. 1). This is the voluntary offering of an animal given "to make atonement" for the worshiper. It is to be totally consumed by the fire of the altar.
2. Grain offering (Lev. 2). This is the voluntary offering of grain given in thanksgiving to God as a memorial portion of the harvest.
3. Peace offering (Lev. 3). This is the voluntary offering of an animal which is then eaten in a communal meal demonstrating fellowship and communion with God.
4. Sin offering (Lev. 4-5:13). This is the prescribed offering of an animal to "make atonement" for the worshiper who has committed sin unintentionally, whereupon "he shall be forgiven."
5. Guilt offering (Lev. 5:14-19). Like the sin offering, this is the offering of an animal to "make atonement," required for the worshiper who has committed sin unintentionally.

In addition to these offerings, each year the people were to observe the Day of Atonement, which is described in Leviticus 16. One goat was offered up as a sin offering for the people, and another, the scapegoat, was left to die in the wilderness after being made to bear the sins of the people through the laying on of the high priest's hands. This ceremony was designed to make atonement for the sanctuary, the tent of meeting, the altar, the priests, and for all of the people (Lev. 16:33).

Leviticus states that the Day of Atonement was for "all their sins," with no apparent distinction between those that are intentional and those that are not. However, Hebrews 9:7 seems to suggest that even the Day of Atonement was designed to cover only those sins which were committed in ignorance. This would accord well with Numbers 15, which speaks of the efficacy of the sin offerings for unintentional sin (vv. 22-29) but declares that the one who sins defiantly "shall be cut off from among his people" and bear his guilt (vv. 30-31).

Is it possible that no intentional sin can be covered by sacrifice? Walter Kaiser rejects this idea, saying that Numbers 15:30-31 is speaking only of the unpardonable sin (blasphemy against the Holy Spirit).¹² This explanation does not seem to be warranted, particularly since the Numbers passage goes on to provide narrative examples of "high-handed" sin which do not fit the criteria of Matthew 12:31.¹³ However, since certain intentional sins may be atoned for through sacrifice (Lev. 5:1-13; 6:1-7; 19:20-22), it would be a mistake to say that the sacrificial system only related to unintentional sins.

At the same time, the fact that certain sins are not covered means that those who commit them have no recourse but to appeal to the mercy and grace of God. That seems to be the case with David after his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. He was doubly subject to the death penalty according to Leviticus 20:10 and Numbers 35:31, and he recognized that no sacrifices were adequate in his case. He prayed, "Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:16-17; cf. Ps. 40:6). David's sin was so great that he could not find atonement through the sacrifice of an animal. He was left to throw himself upon the mercy of God.

¹²Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 118.

¹³ Verses 32-36 of Numbers 15 describe an individual who was stoned by the congregation for violating the sabbath day. Chapter 16 then describes the rebellion of Korah, which also ended in death.

The Necessity of Grace

David began his psalm, "Be gracious to me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness; according to the greatness of Thy compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps. 51:1-2). In a situation such as David's, the Old Testament believer's dependence upon the grace of God is readily apparent. He had nowhere else to turn. No sacrifices were prescribed for such a sin.

However, it's important to realize that God's grace was required for other sins as well. In fact, His grace formed the basis of the entire sacrificial system. John Feinberg summarizes this point quite well:

In attempting to set forth God's plan of salvation, it is essential to recognize initially that at all times in history salvation must begin with God's gracious activity. Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8 that 'by grace are ye saved,' is true of every believer, regardless of the dispensation in which he lives. The major reason that salvation must be a result of God's gracious activity lies in the condition of man. God demands absolute righteousness of any creature who would be saved. But no one except Christ ever met such standards (Psalm 14:3; Rom. 3:10-12). The problem is complicated by the fact that not only is no one righteous, but that no one even has the ability to live a perfectly righteous life (John 1:13; 3:5; 6:44; 8:34; Rom. 7:18, 24; 8:7, 8; 2 Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1, 8-10; Heb. 11:6). Given man's inability to do right in God's eyes (man's problem ever since the Fall), if God were to deal with men in strict justice alone, no one would be saved. Thus, since God has chosen to save men, He extends divine grace toward them. The ways in which such grace expresses itself may vary at different times, but what is constant is that God's method of salvation is always a grace method, never a works method.¹⁴

God's people have recognized the necessity of His grace in the face of their own mortality from the very beginning. Genesis 4:26 provides an excellent illustration of this. Coming at the close of a section of Genesis documenting Cain's act of murder and the violent boasting of Lamech, the text notes that Seth's son was named Enosh, highlighting his mortality. Farris writes,

The verb that stands behind this common noun occurs some ten times in the Hebrew Old Testament. In nine instances it is a passive participle modifying words such as "wound," "sickness," and "pain." The form is generally translated as "incurable." It is used as a finite verb only once, describing the fatal illness of the infant born to David and Bathsheba. Reflecting circumstances and conditions that terminate in death, the core idea of the verbal root seems to designate the idea of weakness and mortality. Accordingly 'enos is a term for man or humanity that denotes frailty and means "man" in the sense of "mortal" (Pss. 9:20; 103:15; Job. 25:4).¹⁵

Farris goes on to suggest that they named the baby Enosh, or "Mortal," because of their recognition that life was fragile in a sinful world. It was in this context that "people began to call upon the name of the Lord" in the second part of verse 26. In recognition of their frailty, people sought the eternal God.

¹⁴John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, 53.

¹⁵Farris, 52-53.

Ryrie correctly points out several ways in which God's grace was manifested in the Old Testament.¹⁶ He elected Israel and made blessings available by grace (Lev. 26:4-8; Deut. 7:14-16). He restored His sinning people by grace (Jer. 31:20; Hos. 2:19). He revealed Himself to the nation by grace (Ps. 143:11; Jer. 14:21) and made the covenant by grace.

Such lists, however, tend to minimize the fact that any relationship or communication between a holy God and sinful mankind can only take place by His grace. Note the content of God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6,7: "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." The final statement about the consequences of sin being passed to successive generations has been used to make God appear to be overly cruel, particularly when compared to the revelation of the New Testament. However, Deuteronomy 7:9 demonstrates that the reference to "thousands" in this passage also refers to a number of generations. What God is saying is that He continues His covenant faithfulness for a thousand generations, but brings judgment for only three or four. Truly the God of Israel is a God of grace.

The Necessity of Faith

The idea that the Law is the pathway to life may seem like only a short step from the legalistic idea that one could merit eternal salvation through personal effort. That idea, however, is clearly rejected in the Old Testament. God is always the one who mercifully saves, and the sacrifices were an expression of faith on the part of the repentant worshiper who was looking to Him (not the act of sacrifice) for forgiveness. Consider the following passages:

Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come to the Lord
and bow myself before the God on high?
Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings,
with yearling calves?
Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams,
in ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I present my first-born for my rebellious acts,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?
He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Isaiah 1:11-18

"What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" says the Lord.
"I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed cattle.
And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs, or goats.
When you come to appear before Me,
Who requires of you this trampling of My courts?
Bring your worthless offerings no longer,
Their incense is an abomination to Me.
New moon and sabbath, the calling of assemblies –

¹⁶Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 119-21.

I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly.
 I hate your new moon festivals and your appointed feasts,
 They have become a burden to Me.
 I am weary of bearing them.
 So when you spread out your hands in prayer,
 I will hide My eyes from you,
 Yes, even though you multiply prayers,
 I will not listen.
 Your hands are full of bloodshed.
 Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean;
 Remove the evil of your deeds from My sight.
 Cease to do evil,
 Learn to do good;
 Seek justice,
 Reprove the ruthless;
 Defend the orphan,
 Plead for the widow.
 Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord,
 "Though your sins are as scarlet,
 They will be white as snow;
 Though they are red like crimson,
 They will be like wool."

The offerings themselves were never regarded as sufficient. As Hosea 6:6 reads, "For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Hebrews 11:2, 6 states it clearly – it was by faith that the "men of old gained approval," for "without faith it is impossible to please Him." The verses which follow demonstrate that these Old Testament believers had faith in the promises of God, not in their own efforts.

"Conversion" and Returning to the Lord

Obedience to the Law was not thought of as the means by which one could enter into a relationship with God as much as it was the means by which an already-established relationship was to be maintained (Deut. 6:20-25). For this reason, it is more appropriate to think of the sacrifices in the context of sanctification than in the context of conversion.¹⁷ Note that the common cry was for Israel to "return" to the Lord whom they had forsaken, not to come to an initial point of conversion (Deut. 30:1-10; 1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 8:46-53; 2 Kings 23:25; Hos. 6:1; 14:1; Is. 55:6,7). Wells's summary is very appropriate:

In the Old Testament, individuals and the nation of Israel are called to "turn away" from evil or other gods and to "return" [*shubh*] to God. . . . This is "insider conversion" – the

¹⁷Ross writes, "It must be noted . . . that the sacrificial system was given to Israel as the means whereby she could maintain her covenant relationship with her holy God and his salvation. The sacrifices enabled people to renew this relationship when it was broken by sin; in so doing, the sacrifices focused the worshipers' attention on the past events and present realities of salvation. Therefore, the sacrificial system is more closely related to the NT doctrine of sanctification than any other soteriological category. But even so the sacrifices did deal with atonement and forgiveness, and their features were typological of the atonement and forgiveness of sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ." (Allen P. Ross, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, edited by John S. Feinberg, 175.)

people of God are summoned to return to the covenant relationship that already exists. Even when they have been attracted to the worship of other gods, the presupposition appears to be that this is a temporary aberration—they are "really" God's people underneath. Thus the covenant context is crucial to an understanding of the significance of *shubh*.

Occasionally *shubh* is used in a noncovenantal context, as when the Ninevites "turn from" their wickedness even though they are outside of the covenant (Jon. 3:8, 10). Although the Old Testament holds out hope for the conversion of the Gentiles as the blessings of Abraham spread to "all families of the earth" (Gen. 12:3), this hope is generally expressed in terms of Israel's special role as God's people. The Gentiles are to share in Israel's blessings, rather than turn to God in isolation. By the New Testament period, the hope for the inclusion of the Gentiles had developed naturally into a Jewish missionary concern to make proselytes—Gentiles who became Jews—insofar as this was possible.

Thus although *shubh* is the closest Hebrew equivalent to our term *conversion*, it is used in a covenantal, not an evangelistic, context in the Old Testament. *Shubh* does not focus on a decisive "change of religion" or on a personal, religious transformation through a once-only crisis. Instead, *shubh* emphasizes maintaining an existing covenant relationship through continual "turning" from evil to God, a process in which both God and the individual (or more typically the community as a whole) have a part.¹⁸

With its emphasis on the nation of Israel as the people of God, the Old Testament generally views salvation as something that takes place within the believing community. One could be excluded from the community (cut off from among the people) due to sin, and one could gain entrance into the community from the outside (cf. Is. 56:3-8), but in any case the individual is related to God by being related to the community of God's people.¹⁹ The legitimate application of the Law to strangers reinforces this point (Ex. 12:48; Lev. 19:34; 24:22; Num. 9:14; Deut. 10:18).

Progressive Revelation and Resurrection

In the progress of revelation, this corporate focus of salvation underwent some development as Israel recognized instances of obvious injustice, particularly at the time of the exile.

The covenant promised the faithful a long life of blessing in the land, with the expectation that the wicked would be cut off. Psalm 73 describes one of the historical difficulties of this hope—sometimes the wicked prospered more than the righteous. If the only locus of promised blessing or judgment was the present physical life, common experience would seem to contradict God's promise. That's why Asaph writes in verses 16 and 17, "When I pondered to understand this, it was troublesome in my sight until I came into the sanctuary of God; then I perceived their end." What Asaph realized through divine revelation was that there would eventually be justice, even if he did not see it right away. Individuals would be treated fairly. Daniel 12:1,2 makes the issue clearer—some will be resurrected in order to receive their just reward, while others will be resurrected to receive "everlasting contempt." The concept of

¹⁸David F. Wells, *Turning to God: Biblical Conversion in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989): 31-32.

¹⁹This is perhaps also related to the concept of mediation, which Israel demanded in Exodus 20:19.

physical resurrection thus combines the expectation of justice after death with the covenantal expectation of physical blessings in the land. The injustices of this life will be rectified by the next, and God's promises will stand confirmed.

In this clarification of the future judgment, the focus of salvation shifted away from the community and toward the individual. This transition was encouraged by the nation's exile, in which many suffered unjustly before reconstituting the believing community as a remnant of faithful individuals.²⁰

What this means is that it was not until fairly late in Israel's history that people began to think about salvation in the context of individual resurrection. As they thought of salvation in a very physical sense with a focus on this world, divine revelation ultimately pulled back the curtains a little further to demonstrate that more was involved – the nature of eternal consequences.

An Overview Through New Testament Eyes

This lesson has attempted to describe the doctrine of salvation as it is developed in the Old Testament with the understanding that progressive revelation was not completed until after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have the more complete picture, of course, and there is value to be found in filling in some of the details as we look back on the Old Testament.

Salvation Always by Grace through Faith

It cannot be emphasized enough that the Old Testament did not teach a works salvation. There is no possible way that we as fallen creatures can accomplish our own salvation (see notes on the sinfulness of humanity). As Paul wrote, "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly" (Gal. 2:21). If it is at all possible for someone to be saved by keeping commandments, then there was no reason for Christ to die. Old Testament believers were saved eternally (even if they did not fully understand it) by grace through faith (Heb. 11:2).

Salvation Always in Christ

In the lessons which follow, we will discuss the concepts of propitiation, atonement, and justification. The purpose of those lessons will be to emphasize the fact that salvation can only come through the cross of Jesus Christ. However, it is important to realize that Old Testament believers were saved on the basis of Christ's death even though His crucifixion had not yet taken place. Romans 3:25 says that Christ was made an atoning sacrifice on our behalf to satisfy the righteousness of God, a righteousness (and justice) that had been temporarily laid aside as God "passed over the sins previously committed." This will be discussed in much more detail shortly, but what we must see here is that God's anger was postponed until it was satisfied on the cross.

²⁰David L. Miller summarizes this trend: "The pre-exilic prophets changed the national theology drastically. The belief in an indestructible state was changed into a destructible state but with a hope for its renewal in the future. Membership in the new community no longer depended only on being a descendant of Abraham; now one had to be a righteous descendant of Abraham. The rewards and punishments for righteousness and offenses, respectively, were taken from the corporate level and placed on an individual level. Thus, the national theology was given a foundation on which to exist after the destruction of the state" ("The Development of the Concept of Immortality in the Old Testament," Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1977).

This means that the forgiveness extended toward the Old Testament believer was based not on the blood of the sacrificed animal, but on the blood of the soon-to-be-sacrificed Savior. "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb. 10:4).

Summary

While defending himself against the common, but erroneous,²¹ charge that dispensationalists teach different ways of salvation within each dispensation, Ryrie provides a nice summary on salvation in the Old Testament. "The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ. The *requirement* for salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations."²²

For Further Reading

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²¹Cf. John Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament*, 39-77.

²²Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today*, 123.

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