

Introduction

“I, even I, am the LORD, And besides Me there is no savior.” This is the testimony of the 8th century prophet Isaiah when the God of Israel declares emphatically that He alone is the savior of all and everything. There can be no salvation in any capacity apart from the sovereign hand of Yahweh. Realizing that this passage is found much later in biblical revelation, this begs some questions concerning the nature of salvation and that of a saving God. Why does God save? How does He save? Are there stipulations concerning His salvation? The focus of this paper is to examine the ways in which God has provided Salvation in the Old Testament (OT) and also to highlight, when necessary, the continuity or discontinuity between this OT salvation and the salvation that is explained in the New Testament (NT).

Realizing that the NT more clearly articulates the inspiration and authority of the OT as coming from God (2 Timothy 3:15-17), we must begin by recognizing the authorial integrity of the entire canon of scripture. Even though it is true that God has brought a more elucidated theological picture in the NT, we must not fall into the trap of implying that somehow God has changed His overarching ways of dealing with mankind. We have the testimony of Malachi 3:6 where we are told that *“I am Yahweh, I change not.”* Yet it is fair to say that Yahweh does not allow Himself to be put into the proverbial box either. As God, it is His prerogative to modify, without lying (Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2), His stipulations for mankind. One example of this is related to the consumption of food. We can see that God originated and commanded mankind to be vegetarian (Genesis 1:29). Later, He modifies this to include meat without the blood (Genesis 9:3) and through Moses brings further modification to dietary laws (Leviticus

11). Venturing into the NT, we see that Jesus modifies these dietary laws once again (Mark 7:19), as does Paul (1 Timothy 4:3-5).

Even though we can see various modifications to the rules that guide the believer, we must realize that a cohesive biblical theology has always presented salvation as through grace, faith, and sacrifice. Or has it? It is the contention of this paper that there isn't, nor can be, any contradiction between the methods of salvation found in the NT in contradistinction to the OT. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." Additionally the testimony of Hebrews 9:22 is "And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission." There are some that might argue we are playing a fanciful game of eisegesis when beginning with the NT, but as was mentioned earlier, the NT many times speaks with greater transparency. The point is that regardless of whether we begin in the NT, there is a single authoritative canon where God speaks forth a consistent message as it relates to salvation. We would expect in discovering an OT salvation motif, a similar, if not identical, motif to the NT teaching.

There has been vigorous debate, primarily between covenant theologians and dispensationalists concerning the method of salvation.¹ When dealing with OT salvation, covenant theologians have sought to express the continuity between the testaments while charging dispensationalists with positing more than one way of salvation.² It is my intent

¹ Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 105-106. See this discussion as it highlights the charges that are commonly made against dispensationalists as well as the response that Ryrie gives in challenging the straw man commonly asserted by covenant theologians.

² Klooster, Fred, 132-147.

to demonstrate that the OT and NT provide one way of salvation. One that is rooted in grace, faith, and sacrifice.

Old Testament Salvation by Grace

Before delving into the specifics of grace, it might be helpful to briefly mention the meaning of salvation as found in the OT. There are a variety of Hebrew words that bring forth the overarching idea of salvation. These listed in the Anchor Bible Dictionary include: *nāṣal* (“deliver”), *pālaṭ* (“bring to safety”), *pādāh* (var. *pāda*, “redeem”) and *mālaṭ* (“deliver”). Two major salvific terms are *gā'al* (“redeem,” “buy back,” “restore,” “vindicate,” or “deliver”) and *yāš'a* (“save,” “help in time of distress,” “rescue,” “deliver,” or “set free”).³ It is true that all these portray the major themes of deliverance or salvation, but there is an inherent risk in evaluating these words that might cause us to miss the point of spiritual salvation. I would add to these words: צַדִּיק *Tzadeq* (to justify or make righteous- Isaiah 53:11) as well as רָפָא *Rapha* (to heal- Isaiah 53:5). Both of these are acts of deliverance and salvation in the spiritual sense. We know that the greatest need of mankind is not deliverance from enemies, peril, etc, but a full and final deliverance from sin (John 8:34-36). In missing this exact point of spiritual salvation, P. Sagar posits that salvation is a work that is done cooperatively with God and that a right understanding of salvation “would make our faith an adventure and not a passive reception of the salvation of in God.”⁴ So for him, it becomes an aspect of social renewal or even victory over our sins, but not a deliverance from them. Others have maintained at

³ Gerald O'Collins, 907.

⁴ Sagar, 204.

least the three different nuances of salvation including: 1) national salvation; 2) individual salvation from sin, diseases, and enemies; and 3) eschatological salvation.⁵

When we begin to understand the slavery that is found in mankind due to sin, we much better realize the need for a complete salvation. It is obvious that salvation in the OT provided deliverance from enemies, etc. (Exodus), but it was never left without a focus of individual responsibility and pursuit to be holy like our God (Leviticus 11:45). Sin has entered our world, causing mankind to become corrupt and in great need of a salvation that provides: forgiveness of sin, a new heart that is willing and able to serve God in truth, sincerity, and obedience (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31:31-34).

This section is about OT salvation being rooted in Grace. Before we begin to understand grace, it's imperative that we understand the need for grace. Grace is usually defined as unmerited divine favor upon those who deserve only punishment.⁶ The contrast is made quite clearly in the NT that salvation is a gift that is given to men by a gracious act of God. If man deserved this gift then it is not of grace, but of debt that God would owe. Thus, Grace and salvation by works become mutually exclusive due to the sinful condition of mankind (Romans 3:23-24; 4:16; 11:6). Therefore, the need for salvation to be rooted in grace is demonstrated by the sinfulness of mankind. It is quite clear that mankind is plagued with the corrupting nature of sin so that in the NT we have the clear doctrine of man's depravity. He is said to have: fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23), is not sick but dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1-3), is not good (Romans 3:10) nor is seeking after God or profitable in any way (3:11-12).

⁵ Zink, 407.

⁶ Grudem, 200.

There is no need to see this as simply a NT teaching, these truths are rooted lucidly in the OT. Man has fallen in the garden and is immediately confronted with the aggressive nature of sin as “crouching at the door” (Genesis 4:7). We read that mankind was wicked before the Lord and every intent of the heart was wicked continually (Genesis 6:5). We have the witness that there is: none good (Psalm 14⁷); none just or good (Ecclesiastes 7:20); not a man who doesn’t sin (1 Kings 8:46); nor is the righteousness of mankind anything but used menstrual cloths (Isaiah 64:6). The picture we have of man is that he is unable to be pleasing to God in meriting salvation for himself. Therefore, salvation must be given as an act of grace by the unmerited favor of God Himself. It is not by works nor has it ever been, either in the OT or the NT.

The appearance of grace in the OT appears in three main words and is found conveniently in God’s self-revelation in Exodus 34:6. These are: 1) רַחֲמִים *compassion*; 2) חַנּוּן *gracious* (adj.); 3) חַסֵּד *merciful*.⁸ The idea of God’s compassion appears 13 times and is used only of God (Deut. 4:31; 2 Chron. 30:9; Neh. 9:17, 31; Ps. 78:38; 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 112:4; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2). This motif is used primarily as a reference to God’s compassion towards His people in allowing them to repent, be forgiven, and receive salvation and restoration. We see חַנּוּן *grace* and its close cognate חֵן (noun) first appearing in Genesis 6:8 where we are told that Noah found grace (favor) in the eyes of God. It is not to be missed that this is the same chapter that demonstrates the wickedness of man and God’s desire to bring judgment. Yet in the midst of this judgment salvation is being offered by grace to the person of Noah. A sampling of this word shows that even

⁷ See the LXX version of Psalm 14 which is quoted in Romans 3:10-18. This provides the full extent of man’s wickedness.

⁸ John S. Kselman, 1084.

though it is used of man and God, this grace was operative from the beginning through OT history (Ex. 3:21; 11:3; 33:16; Judges 6:17; 2 Sam. 15:25; Ps. 84:11; Prov. 3:34; Jer. 31:2; Zech 12:10). The priestly blessing of Numbers 6:27 is deliberate in asking for the Lord to be gracious. In trying to connect this word too much with redemption, Ryrie comments, “At best it can only be said that this doctrinal relationship between redemption and *chen*, grace, is but scantily revealed in the Old Testament.” Yet he goes on to mention that there is some connection between the two in a redemptive sense (Job 33:24; Ps. 26:11).⁹

The final word related to God’s grace is that of *chesed*. This word appears over 250 times in the OT and is the “firm loving-kindness expressed between related people and particularly in the covenants into which God entered with His people and which His *chesed* is firmly guaranteed.”¹⁰ In keeping with the motif of a broad nuance of salvation, *chesed* is seen as the basis in physical, emotional, and spiritual deliverance (Ps. 6:4; 31:7, 16; 57:3; 69:13-16; 86:13; 107:8; 136:23, 24; Numbers 14:9).

It was demonstrated at the beginning of this section that the greatest demonstration of the need for grace is the condition of mankind. We know that God is unable to behold sin (Hab. 1:13) and so the need for mankind to become righteous must be accomplished through trust in God’s grace.¹¹ John Feinberg comments on this necessity, “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

⁹ Ryrie (1963), 15.

¹⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹¹ Baker, 70.

works method.”¹² Walt Kaiser agrees and laments that many find it surprising to hear that the OT also has a message of salvation through grace and not works.¹³

Salvation Through Faith

After demonstrating that grace is something that is a prerequisite in establishing the motivation for God the savior to bring salvation to mankind, we understand that there is a certain element of trust or faith in this grace (Isaiah 30:15; 7:9; 28:16).¹⁴ This naturally should lead us to understand the terminology of belief in the OT. Again, it has been demonstrated that the NT is clear in its injunctions that faith is required (Romans 3-4; Heb 11:6; Gal. 3:24, etc.) The standard word for belief in the OT is אָמַן. This is the word that we see in the great salvific passage of Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to Him for righteousness.” The basic meaning is to “sustain, support, or carry” (2 Kings 18:16) in the Qal and in the Niphal is one of “firmness, stability, and confidence.”¹⁵ The form found in Genesis 15:6 is in the Hiphil and this form denotes that of belief or trust, as we would be more familiar with from the NT.

This concept of belief is not something new or foreign, but is one that is continually expected out of the people of God. The call for repentance and faith (belief) in the God of Israel is repeated.¹⁶ Moses writes that he is concerned whether the people of Israel would believe that God truly sent him (Ex. 4:1-3). After Moses appears and provides the signs to the people it says that they believed that Moses had truly been sent by God (4:30-31). Yet what did they believe in? Was this faith in the God of Israel? It

¹² John Feinberg, 53.

¹³ Kaiser (1994), 3.

¹⁴ Baker, 70.

¹⁵ Joseph P. Healey, 744.

¹⁶ To be thorough, I have chosen to subtly add the word repentance here. It is clear that the idea of repentance *metanoia* in the NT is closely paralleled with *shub* in the OT. Just as in the NT, repentance and faith become synonymous or simultaneous actions. It is my position that the idea of repentance along with faith is assumed.

would seem reasonable to assume it was that point that their faith began to grow, at least in a seed form. It was later that they did put their trust in the God of Israel and His servant Moses (14:31). God also initiated a choice and response to be made by the people to “believe forever” in Him (19:9). After the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, the people of Israel are scolded for their lack of belief in the God of Israel (Deut. 1:32; 9:23). Even the prophet Isaiah challenged the king of Judah to believe in the word of God (Isaiah 7:9). The ultimate height of the OT is that the people would not believe the report of the Lord concerning the coming Messiah (Isaiah 53:1) as well the truth that the just shall live by faith (Hab. 2:4).

The real debate at this juncture is to what exactly was the content of the faith of the OT saints, beginning with the Garden up until the NT. Dispensationalists will hold to the belief that “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.”¹⁷ Feinberg concurs with this when he says that the ultimate object of faith in any and every age is God Himself.¹⁸ This is challenged by Kaiser who takes issue with the fact that the faith mentioned here is not explicitly put in Christ, but instead leaves open the possibility for a faith in general theism (Creator God) and avoids the specific requirements of faith in the coming redeemer. Yet he realizes the challenges posed by the amount of redemption knowledge available (ie. Progressive revelation) and goes on to say, “This was especially true with regard to the object of faith: God was the object of faith in the OT and continues to be the object and

¹⁷ Ryrie (1994), 115.

¹⁸ John Feinberg, 56.

focus of faith today.”¹⁹ It seems that even though Kaiser’s words are in agreement, his main argument was against those who would seek, in the name of God’s mercy, to give a justified excuse for the salvation of those today who are unevangelized with the name of Jesus and simply have a belief in a creator God. I wholeheartedly agree that this error should be avoided, but the nature of progressive revelation demands that the content of faith be somewhat fluid as it relates to the unfolding of God’s redemption plan.

The pertinent question of the necessity of faith is to what does the person put their faith in? We can reasonably and generically agree that faith in God is necessary, as long as it doesn’t capitulate to the error noted above. If we put aside semantics, it most likely would be safe to assume that all would agree that a faith in God and His revealed will is required in any and every age. Kaiser goes on to say that the object of faith was “no other than the coming Son of God.”²⁰ My concern here is to the extent that He uses Son of God. Is this phrase used in its full NT usage or simply denoting the person of the Son of God. There is further confusion when he quotes Acts 4:12 as it relates to salvation not being found in any other person or name. Is the emphasis on the name or person? He goes on to mention “the object of the OT believer’s faith was no different than our own, except for the fact that his name as not yet announced as Jesus.”²¹ This helps to clarify the point about it not being necessary to understand the *name* of Jesus, but focuses the faith on the coming person of the Messiah.

If we take this belief that all the OT believers needed to put their faith in the Man of Promise, it fits well into the giving of subsequent revelation. Yet it does provide some challenges. The first challenge we have is the extent at which this knowledge was

¹⁹ Kaiser (1994), 1-2.

²⁰ Ibid., 9.

²¹ Ibid., 11.

available. It seems that when a certain OT saint or prophet receives further revelation, we must ask how extensive this fresh understanding was available to all. However, let's approach this diachronically and quickly peruse OT history.

If we begin at Eden and the removal from the garden, the protoevangelium was announced in the coming "seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15). It is clear from this and the subsequent context that an actual human person was being spoken of. Thus, there is the first hint of promise for these sinners in need of redemption. Again, we might ask, what was the content of faith for Adam and Eve to be saved? What promise were they putting their faith in? There is no explicit answer to this, but there is the narrative in Genesis 4, which describes the excitement that Eve had over receiving a man "with the Lord." It seems that Eve believed she was receiving the promise that was prophesied in Genesis 3:15. After Cain kills Abel and it is realized that neither one of them were the promised descendant, she gives birth to Seth and again sees him as the promised one. She calls his name Seth "for God has appointed me another seed" (Genesis 4:25). As inferential as it is, the faith that Eve and, by implication, Adam was in the promised Son. Were they fully aware of all the implications of substitution, sacrifice, etc. as it related to this Seed? Most likely not, but there still is demonstrated faith in the coming one.

The next inference that can be drawn is from the covenant that God established after the flood with Noah and his descendants (Genesis 9:9). The content of faith required here was that of trust in God's establishing his covenant with Noah's family. It can be safely assumed that the same message of a promised redeemer was involved in the content of faith of Noah, in addition to the other premises of the Noahic covenant.

Moving on to Abraham, we see clearly that God has promised him a Seed, Land, and to be a blessing to all peoples (Genesis 12:3). Later God reaffirms His pledge to bring forth the promised Son and it is said that Abraham “believed” or in God. Again, with the backdrop of the protoevangelium in Gen. 3:15, it is not unreasonable to believe that Abraham not only believed God for an immediate son, Isaac, but also looked forward to the Son, which would be through which all families of the earth would be blessed (Gen. 12:3). The main point is to show that salvation was through faith in the promise of God. Isaiah 49:10 also seems to point that the promised son would now be coming through the tribe of Judah.

The giving of the law containing sacrifices and the Exodus will be touched up on the next section, but suffice it to say that, as mentioned prior, the call to faith was very much a part of the time of the Mosaic legislation (Deut. 1:32; 9:23). There is greater understanding as to the role of the promised one to come. He will be like Moses and unto Him shall you hearken (Deut. 18:18-19). Another interesting aspect as it relates to salvation comes with this peculiar person known as the Angel of the Lord. It is evident that He is known in the same category as Yahweh (Gen. 16:10; 22:15-17; Ex. 3:2) and even takes on the role as the one who forgives sin (Ex. 23:21). God commands them to look unto Him and hearken unto Him.

The next major jump as it relates to the promise of faith and son is the promise given to David in 2 Samuel 7 where God makes many promises to the person of David and to his descendants. It is here where even more focus is put on the promised Seed of Abraham and now through David. What was the content of faith in this time period? I agree with Feinberg when he says that the “the content of faith is cumulative through out

Scripture.”²² David was called to put his trust and faith in the God of Israel, but most specifically in the coming redeemer who would come from his own body. We can see this truth as it relates to his writing of Psalm 2:12 where it reads, “Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, And you perish *in* the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who take refuge in Him.” This text highlights that refuge or trust is being placed in someone other than Yahweh, but who an extension of Yahweh. Note that this is similar to the Angel of the Lord in Exodus 23.

Moving into the Prophetic time frame, the revelation of the coming one explodes and thus the cumulative faith being placed in the coming one is even further developed. We begin to know where He will be born (Micah 5:2), the nature of his substitutionary death (Isaiah 53), the time of His arrival (Daniel 9), the fact that He would be God’s salvation (Isaiah 49:6), and of His resurrection from the dead (Isaiah 53:10, 11 DSS; Psalm 16:10). It’s at this point that the question once again arises as to whether every single Israelite had the fullness of this knowledge. It is doubtful that this knowledge was fully extensive, but the object of faith needed to be in God and in His promised seed. An even greater question is does this apply to the people of Nineveh to whom Jonah went and preached. He preached judgment with no mention of the promised redeemer and yet it says they “believed” and turned from their sin (Jonah 3:5- same word as Abraham in Genesis 15:6). There is no doubt that grace and faith were necessary, but this presents a problem for demanding that a full blown belief in the coming “one” was necessary. Was it simply a belief in the God of Israel or in a Creator God? It is possible, however unlikely, to say that it wasn’t genuine salvation, but instead avoidance of judgment.

²² Feinberg, 57.

The final major development for the promise and content of faith is the pledge of the New Covenant. It is interesting that there is no mention of the coming one, except to acknowledge that this covenant will provide for the giving of the Holy Spirit, a restored relationship, obedience to God's torah, and forgiveness of sin (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 18:31; 36:26-27).

What is the exact requirement of faith? It would seem that the necessary content revolves primarily around the person of promise began in Genesis 3:15 and continued up until John the Baptist in the NT. Yet even when Jesus began His ministry, the very disciples He taught still did not understand the fullness of the death and resurrection of the coming one (Mark 9:32). Before criticizing the disciples for their lack of insight we realize that in the eternal plan of God, He hid the fullness of many of His truths from His people in order to accomplish His purpose. We see this beginning in Deuteronomy 29:4 through Isaiah 6:9-12 and into the gospels. We read that Jesus shared with His disciples that He was about to be betrayed, but "they did not understand this saying and it was hidden from that so that they did not perceive it" (Luke 9:45; 24:16, 45). However, we note that they were given privileges that previous prophets longed to see (Matt 13:16-17; 1 Peter 1:10-12).

Salvation through Sacrifices

It should be noted that the act of a sacrifice from an individual provided no merit in God's eyes. There is not a single work or obedient act that would warrant meritorious debt on the part of sinner (Titus 3:5; Isaiah 64:6). Yet we understand that God has instituted the sacrifice of blood for the giving of atonement and forgiveness of sin (Lev.

17:11; Heb. 9:22). These verses demonstrate that an objective sacrifice was necessary, but the actual act of the giving of a sacrifice provided no merit.

Beginning in the Garden of Eden we see a connection between sin, death, and the sacrifice of a substitute for the covering of sin (Genesis 3:21). The evidence bears itself out in seeing the continuation of this procedure of sacrifice (Genesis 4; 8:20; 12:7-8; 22; 35) from the Garden through the patriarchal period. It was beginning in the time of the Exodus that God brought forth greater stipulations concerning the need for sacrifice (Exodus 12; Lev. 16). Further, during the time of the law it became more clearly evident that a person would have to be sacrificed for sin (Isaiah 53; Dan. 9:24-26; Psalm 22:16; Zech. 12:10).²³

If the blood of bulls and goats did not take away sin (Hebrews 10:4), what real value did they provide? God certainly set the pattern and extensive instructions for sacrifices, but also see that God was not interested in external acts alone (Isaiah 1:11-17; 1 Sam 15:22-23), but must be accompanied with confession and repentance (Lev. 5:5; 16:29, 31 cf. Num. 5:6). The offering, though commanded, was meaningless unless he brought with an appropriate spirit.²⁴ Kaiser says quite clearly that expositors should be careful not to infer that blood of bulls and goats could remove sins, for nowhere does the OT claimed that it did. He makes helpful distinction in that “the Israelites experienced *subjective efficacy* for their sins even though they had to wait for the *objective efficacy* until Christ’s death for all sins.”²⁵

To sum up this section, we note that sacrifices were given as a subjective way of providing instant forgiveness, but all these pointed to the coming Promised-One who

²³ Ibid. 60.

²⁴ Rowley, 110.; see also Kaiser (1978), 118.

²⁵ Kaiser, (1994), 13.

would provide the ultimate objective sacrifice for all of the elects' sins (Romans 3:25). Thus sacrifices were necessary as temporary relief from guilt and sin, provided anticipatory shadows of the final sacrifice, and ultimately was the means by which Jesus provided propitiation for the sins of God's people (1 John 2:2).

Conclusion

It has been the intent of this paper to provide an understanding of seeing God as savior and the salvation that He has provided for His people beginning in the OT. We have sought to highlight that there is one unified method of salvation through grace, faith, and sacrifice. The content of the faith that began in the Garden of Eden was that of the promised person and redeemer whom we now know as Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It is amazing thing to see that God's character is maintained as He demonstrated "at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Amen.

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