

[p.39]

### 3

## Salvation in the Old Testament

**John S. Feinberg**

**JOHN S. FEINBERG (M.A., Ph.D., University of Chicago; M. Div., Talbot Theological Seminary; Th.M., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is professor of systematic theology at Liberty Baptist Seminary, Lynchburg, Virginia.**

What does the Bible teach about salvation? Ask this question of most people, and they will respond with their understanding of the New Testament's teaching on salvation. One can search for hours and find little written about salvation in the Old Testament. Biblical theologians tend to discuss it more often than systematic theologians, but neither group devotes much attention to it. Moreover, if one were to peruse course outlines for most classes taught in seminaries or Bible colleges in soteriology, he would find that the question of salvation in the Old Testament receives little or no treatment whatsoever.

If it is difficult to find discussions on the Old Testament's approach to the broad theme of salvation, it is even harder to find treatments of the Old Testament's perspective on the specific matter of salvation of the individual. Although there are studies of such topics as corporate election and national salvation (especially when the topic is physical deliverance from some kind of bondage or evil),<sup>1</sup> it seems that theologians and exegetes have tended to shy away from a consideration of the Old Testament teaching about how an individual was to acquire spiritual salvation. Why this should be so is not entirely clear. Perhaps it has stemmed at least partially from a feeling, on the one hand, that the Old Testament really says nothing different than the New on the matter of personal salvation.

[p.40]

Or perhaps it stems from a fear that what the Old Testament teaches about salvation is so radically different from the teaching of the New Testament that close attention to it would only serve to confuse us about God's manner of dealing with personal salvation, and might even lead us to the theologically damaging conclusion that God has been inconsistent in regard to the matter of salvation.

In view of these considerations, I suggest that the study of salvation in the Old Testament is more urgently needed, and it is my intention to consider several issues related to the Old Testament's teaching about the spiritual salvation of the individual. Obviously, it would be impossible in a study of this length to cover every relevant aspect of Old Testament teaching, but I should like to address three main topics. First, I want to consider the method of salvation. Does Scripture teach more than one way of salvation—an Old Testament and a New Testament way? This matter is of

interest not only from the standpoint of coming to a proper understanding of scriptural teaching, but also because many have thought that dispensationalism involves or even necessitates a commitment to multiple ways of salvation. What I shall argue in regard to the first issue is that neither the approach of Scripture nor that of dispensationalism necessitates holding to multiple methods of salvation. Second, I want to discuss the implementation of salvation. To say that Scripture teaches only one way of salvation is not to specify what it is or how it has been implemented at various times in history, especially during Old Testament times. Third, I want to consider the relationship of Old Testament sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice and to discuss as well the exact soteriological function of sacrifices in the Old Testament system. Involved in the discussion of the function of the sacrifices will be a treatment of their efficacy, especially in view of the statement in Hebrews 10:4 that "not all the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin."\*

### THE METHOD OF SALVATION

How many ways of salvation does Scripture teach? Reading various theologians, one might initially assume that the question is a waste of time, for all seem to assert that Scripture teaches only one way of salvation operative in all economies and at all times. For example, after presenting opposing viewpoints, Hodge emphatically argues:

[p.41]

In opposition to these different views the common doctrine of the Church has ever been, that the plan of salvation has been the same from the beginning. There is the same promise of deliverance from the evils of the apostasy, the same Redeemer, the same condition required for participation in the blessings of redemption, and the same complete salvation for all who embrace the offers of divine mercy.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, Payne argues that in spite of some difference, the doctrine of regeneration is taught in the Old Testament as well as in the New. He explains:

This definition of regeneration as being "in Christ" by no means, however, eliminates the doctrine of the new birth from the Old Testament. There is but one, unified testament, God's sole plan of salvation, through which Christ offers a redemption that is equally effective for the saints of both dispensations. Christ states that Abraham, in the patriarchal period, rejoiced to see His day, "And he saw it, and was glad" (John 8:56). Jesus was the Mediator of the older testament, as well as the newer (Heb. 9:15); and, since it is true that no man cometh unto the Father but by Him (John 14:6) and yet, since the saints of the older dispensation did indeed come to the father (Ps. 73:24), they must have been made perfect in Him (Heb. 11:40).<sup>3</sup>

Examples such as the preceding could be proliferated seemingly ad in finitum, but of course, if that is the case, is it even worthwhile to ask the question about how many ways Scripture teaches? The question is important because there are many who think there is much disagreement

\* In the process of preparing this study I have been greatly aided by discussions and interaction with Duane Dunham, Paul Feinberg, Robert Hughes, and Bruce Ware. I want to express my appreciation for their help.

over the issue. Many non-dispensational writers (such as Hodge and Payne, quoted above), who hold to one method of salvation, have accused dispensationalists of teaching multiple ways of salvation. They assume that since the dispensationalist consistently differentiates between God's program for Israel and His program for the church, since he emphasizes that God institutes different economies with men at various times, and especially since the dispensationalist claims there are significant differences between the dispensation called law and the dispensation called grace (even the labels of the dispensations supposedly tip us off to different methods of salvation), the dispensationalist must hold that Scripture teaches multiple ways of salvation. For example, Daniel Fuller, after quoting the old Scofield Reference Bible, concludes:

Hence Dispensationalism, as expounded by one of its foremost systematizers, teaches two ways of salvation: that during the era of law,

[p.42]

obedience to it was a condition of salvation, whereas during the age of grace, salvation comes simply through faith in Christ.<sup>4</sup>

Payne does not put the matter quite so bluntly as Fuller, but as he reasserts the unity of God's redemptive plan throughout Scripture, the message in regard to dispensationalism is the same as Fuller's. Payne writes:

More serious, however, than its misapplication of particular prophecies, is what amounts to dispensationalism's repudiation of the whole, unified redemptive plan of God in human history. Indeed, the normative truthfulness of the older testament of the past is dependent upon its essential identity with, and fulfillment in, the newer testament of the present and the future. Correspondingly, the blessing for the modern Church, as this is contained in the Old Testament, can be appropriated by today's saints only when they accept their own equation, as the Israel of God, with that ancient Israel to whom God extended His testamental promises. It thus becomes apparent that a comprehensive understanding of God's gracious purpose—which has been one and the same from Genesis 3:15, right on through to the closing chapters of Revelation—lies contingent upon the Christian's recognition of one cross, one testament, one faith, and one Church throughout all history.<sup>5</sup>

These citations level devastating attacks at dispensationalism, especially if dispensationalists in fact hold multiple methods of salvation, whereas Scripture teaches one method. As a matter of fact, dispensationalists (older and contemporary) do hold that Scripture teaches only one way of salvation. In all honesty, however, it must be admitted that statements made by certain dispensationalists in the past appeared to teach multiple ways of salvation. That such careless statements did not reflect the full thinking of those theologians (as can be seen from other statements they made) seems to have escaped many critics of dispensationalism. One such unguarded statement, however, appeared in the old Scofield Reference Bible:

As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 3:24-26; 4:24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation.<sup>6</sup>

[p.43]

Fuller (see above) cites this as evidence that Scofield taught multiple ways of salvation, one by law and one by grace. Certainly, such a statement would appear to be problematic. What seems to be equally problematic, however, is that Fuller never quotes the Scofield Reference Bible when it states that "law neither justifies a sinner nor sanctifies a believer."<sup>7</sup> Fuller went on to claim that although some dispensationalists hold to the view that Scripture teaches only one way of salvation, he claimed that it was a new trend in dispensationalism and not really consistent with its basic line of thought.<sup>8</sup> Fuller was at least willing to admit that dispensationalists make statements contrary to the multiple methods position. But he still thought that this was merely a new development in dispensationalism. Many critics of dispensationalism have not even bothered to mention such statements as those cited by Fuller. Charles Ryrie in *Dispensationalism Today* has presented ample evidence that older as well as more recent dispensationalists in fact hold to only one way of salvation being taught in Scripture.<sup>9</sup> It is truly unfortunate that in spite of all the ink that has been spilled on the subject, the commonly held caricature of dispensationalism (perhaps even held by some uninformed who claim to be dispensationalists themselves) is that it is committed to and even necessitates the notion that Scripture teaches multiple ways of salvation. The old *Scofield Reference Bible* is cited as proof, and that is supposed to settle the matter. Of course, it is equally important to note what the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (the work of many dispensationalists) says. Writers such as Payne (*Theology of the Older Testament*) and Fuller (*The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism*) can hardly be faulted for not taking it into account in their works, since the *New Scofield Reference Bible* was published after their works were completed. However, some changes have been made. The comment concerning the inability of law to justify has not been removed from the notes on Galatians 3. Moreover, the objectionable comments on law and grace have been totally removed from the notes on John 1. In their place we read the following:

In its fullness, grace began with the ministry of Christ involving His death and resurrection, for He came to die for sinners On. 1:17; Mt. 11:28-30; 16:21; 20:28; Rom. 3:24-26; 4:24-25). Under the former dispensation, law was shown to be powerless to secure righteousness and life for a sinful race (Gal. 3:21-22). Prior to the cross man's salvation was through faith (Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4:3), being grounded on Christ's atoning sacrifice, viewed anticipatively by God...; now it is clearly revealed that salvation and righteousness are received by faith in the

[p.44]

crucified and resurrected Savior..., with holiness of life and good works following as the fruit of salvation....<sup>10</sup>

Certainly, the above statement reflects dispensational thinking, but it also clearly speaks of a unified method of salvation-by grace through faith.

Though this discussion of what dispensationalists claim is interesting (especially to a dispensationalist who holds to only one method of salvation), it would seem that there is a much more important question to be asked and answered. The question of greater significance is whether dispensationalism as a system necessitates holding a view of multiple ways of salvation. A description of what dispensationalists hold is one thing, but a much more important question is

whether the system is consistent with a single method of salvation view, a multiple method of salvation view, or both. In other words, what position could a dispensationalist hold without contradicting his system on the matter of the ways of salvation? This is a significant question because the underlying assumption in the attacks of Fuller, Payne, and others, is not just that dispensationalists hold multiple ways of salvation, but that the system demands such a view. The complaint, then, is not so much against what dispensationalists are thought to believe as what the logic of the system purportedly demands.

Does dispensationalism as a system demand adherence to multiple ways of salvation? In order to understand the logic of dispensationalism, it is necessary first to specify its essence. The next task is to determine what sort of position(s) on the method of salvation would fit such a system. Specifying the essence of dispensationalism is not at all easy. A starting point, however, is Ryrie's suggestion. According to Ryrie, there are three necessary conditions of dispensationalism: (1) the distinction between Israel and the church, (2) the usage of a system of literal hermeneutics, and (3) the belief that the underlying purpose of God in the world is to produce his glory.<sup>11</sup> Ryrie is saying that whatever other views a dispensationalist holds, those three conditions mark him off as a dispensationalist.

Although Ryrie's suggestions are indeed helpful, I am not convinced that they present an accurate picture. It would seem unfair to assume that nondispensationalist theologians never distinguish between Israel and the church, never use literal hermeneutics, and do not recognize the glory of God as His purpose in history. It would be better to say that the dispensationalist *consistently* makes these emphases, whereas the nondispensationalist does not.

[p.45]

## **PRINCIPLES OF DISPENSATIONALISM**

The matter of hermeneutics is the crucial issue for dispensationalism. For example, one who consistently uses literal hermeneutics will be on his way to distinguish consistently between Israel and the church and to focus on God's glory as His underlying purpose. In other words, consistent literal hermeneutics (as the dispensationalist understands such hermeneutics) seems to be foundational to dispensationalism. But many nondispensationalists make two claims that call into question the dispensationalists' claim to being practitioners of sound hermeneutics. (1) They claim that they consistently use literal hermeneutics. (2) They claim that dispensationalists do not consistently interpret literally, for they admit that Scripture contains figures of speech and attempt to interpret such figures. Although a full-scale discourse on hermeneutics is beyond the purpose of this study, I think that these issues are important enough to warrant some consideration.

Many nondispensationalists claim that they consistently interpret literally. But their understanding of how literal hermeneutics operates is different. In particular, they argue that literal interpretation demands that many of the Old Testament references to Israel are to be understood as typological of the church. Consequently, even on a literal interpretation, given the principle of typology that dispensationalists certainly accept, many of the Old Testament references to Israel are to be interpreted as referring to the church. After all, they argue, this was

the method of many a New Testament writer. So how can nondispensationalists be blamed for doing the same? An example of this sort of thing appears in Ladd's work when he writes:

The fact is that the New Testament frequently interprets Old Testament prophecies in a way not suggested by the Old Testament context.

Let us take first a very simple illustration. Matthew 2:15 quotes from Hosea 11:1 to prove from Scripture that Jesus must come from Egypt. This, however, is not what the prophecy means in the Old Testament. Hosea says, "When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son." In Hosea this is not a prophecy at all but a historical affirmation that God had called Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus. However, Matthew recognizes Jesus to be God's greater son and deliberately turns a historical statement into a prophecy. This is a principle which runs throughout biblical prophecy. *The Old Testament is reinterpreted* in light of the Christ event....

The main point in the preceding section is that many Old Testament

[p.46]

passages which applied in their historical setting to literal Israel have in the New Testament been applied to the church. What does all this have to do with the question of the millennium? Just this: The Old Testament did not clearly foresee how its own prophecies were to be fulfilled. They were fulfilled in ways quite unforeseen by the Old Testament itself and unexpected by the Jews. With regard to the first coming of Christ, *the Old Testament is interpreted by the New Testament*.

Here is the basic watershed between a dispensational and a nondispensational theology. Dispensationalism forms its eschatology by a literal interpretation of the Old Testament and then fits the New Testament into it. A nondispensational eschatology forms its theology from the explicit teaching of the New Testament.<sup>12</sup>

The last paragraph of Ladd's statement is crucial to the discussion. If one operates as Ladd suggests for the reasons he suggests, one can, it seems, legitimately claim to be using literal hermeneutics. However, it seems that what ultimately generates such a procedure of interpretation as suggested by Ladd is a misunderstanding of the nature of typology (whether Ladd, in fact, makes such an error is beyond my knowledge, but it would seem that the difficulty I shall mention is reflected in the thinking of many nondispensationalists). Undoubtedly, the cases cited by Ladd and others are Old Testament types of something in the New Testament. The problem stems from thinking that, just because we understand the relation of the Old Testament type to its New Testament antitype, either the Old Testament figure has no meaning other than the meaning of the antitype in the New Testament, or the meaning of the type in its own context is simply to be neglected. The point about typology is that the Old Testament type must retain its own meaning in its own context, even though it simultaneously foreshadows its antitype in the New Testament and even has a different meaning in the New Testament context. For example, Joseph may be seen as a type of Christ, which is not to say that the story of Joseph has no importance on its own apart from its relation to Christ. As a matter of fact, neglecting the integrity of the Old Testament meaning of Joseph undermines the basis for the type/antitype relation between Joseph and Christ. The failure of nondispensational interpretation at this point, then, is that its view of typology (a misunderstanding of typology, that is), ignores or minimizes the meaning of the Old Testament event or person in its own setting, just because it takes on another meaning in a New Testament context.

The fact that a type must retain its distinctive meanings in both the Old Testament and New Testament contexts is perhaps never so clearly seen as in the case of Hosea 11:1/Matthew 2:15, an example Ladd gives to

[p.47]

prove that Old Testament passages are reinterpreted in the New Testament. Ladd is unquestionably right about Hosea 11:1 being given a new meaning in Matthew 2:15. What is problematic is that we are given the impression that the meaning of Hosea 11:1 in Hosea 11:1 either becomes the meaning given it in Matthew 2:15, or the meaning of Hosea 11:1 in its context is to be neglected. This really becomes problematic when one recognizes that Hosea 11:1 refers to a past historical event. In the case of Joel 2/Acts 2, one could argue (though incorrectly) that since Joel 2 was yet future to Joel when he wrote it, it must be understood exclusively in terms of Acts 2. However, Hosea 11 presents a different kind of case in that the event referred to in Hosea 11:1 (the Exodus) was already a historical fact at the time Hosea wrote. Therefore, even though the passage is to be seen as typical of Christ, and even though Matthew makes that typological connection, the meaning of Hosea 11:1 in its own context must not be ignored, for the sake of the type/antitype relation and because the passage had a historical referent when Hosea wrote it. The matter of typology can be summarized as follows: (1) a type must have meaning in its own context; (2) the meaning of the type in its own context is essential for a type/antitype relationship (otherwise we have an example of a parable or perhaps an allegory, but not an example of typology); and (3) ignoring items 1 and 2 threatens the very integrity of the Old Testament. The problem that arises from nondispensational approaches to typology is that they seem to neglect items 1 and 2, at best, and deny them, at worst. Consequently, whether one begins with the New Testament and goes to the Old Testament, or vice versa, should not make a bit of difference in one's interpretation of the Old Testament as long as one properly understands the implications of typology. The nondispensationalist may indeed be trying to interpret Scripture in a consistently literal way, but as long as he incorporates a faulty approach to typology, his understanding of and application of literal hermeneutics is problematic.

The claim that dispensationalists actually interpret figuratively on occasion is definitely erroneous. The error stems from neglecting to distinguish between figurative language (e.g., figures of speech) and interpreting figuratively. The former refers to certain phenomena of language itself, whereas the latter refers to a method of interpreting those or any phenomena of language. To interpret figuratively means to decide the meaning of a word or sentence without paying close attention to the denotative or connotative meaning of the words involved, without heeding the demands of context, or without paying attention to grammatical considerations. Literal interpretation, on the other hand, seeks to come to the meaning which is demanded by the denotative and/or connotative meaning of the words under consideration, by the context and by grammar. The one

[p.48]

who interprets literally must always be able to justify his interpretation on the grounds of the phenomena within the context. A figurative interpretation is tied only loosely to the context.

Consequently, we can say that either figures of speech or nonfigurative language may be interpreted figuratively or literally. Recognizing that language contains figures of speech does not indicate that an exegete interprets figuratively.

The keys to determining whether or not one is a dispensationalist rest in hermeneutical, ecclesiological, and eschatological issues, not soteriology. Obviously, the distinction between Israel and the church is of crucial import for both eschatology and ecclesiology. I do not, however, see any soteriological position that is inherent to and thus necessitated by dispensationalism. Thus, the question of whether dispensationalism necessitates a multiple methods of salvation view, or a single way of salvation position is irrelevant. Soteriology is not the determinative area for dispensationalism. For example, if one consistently distinguishes between Israel and the church and applies that distinction throughout his ecclesiology and eschatology, will he be forced to hold any particular view on the methods of salvation issue? It would seem that distinguishing between Israel and the church could fit either a single or multiple method view. One could, without contradicting his system, claim that God has in general two separate programs for the two distinct groups. But He saves both groups by one method of salvation. On the other hand, one could also claim, without contradicting his own position, that God not only works with two separate groups, but that He saves them in different ways. Concerning the glory of God issue, it would seem that the notion of God's purpose ultimately being His glory fits with either view. One way of salvation for all will bring glory to God. But then multiple ways would not have to bring God disgrace.

Notice that at this point I am not speaking about what Scripture actually teaches. My concern is to focus on the intrinsic ideas of dispensationalism and to ask what a dispensationalist could hold without contradicting his position, even if Scripture does not teach something that he could hold. As for the matter of hermeneutics, it should also be obvious that literal hermeneutics, as I have described them, would lead one to hold multiple ways of salvation, if Scripture, interpreted literally, demanded such. Such hermeneutics would lead one to hold a single way of salvation, if Scripture, interpreted literally, demanded such. As a result, I must reiterate that there is nothing intrinsic to dispensationalism's hermeneutics that necessitates either a single or multiple methods view. I know there are critics of dispensationalism who would disagree, but I think they are reacting to what they think dispensationalists hold, rather than to the logic of the system itself. The point is that neither a dis-

[p.49]

pensationalist's hermeneutics nor any doctrinal views he has gained from exegesis of Scripture commit him to holding a multiple or single method view of salvation. Before the dispensationalist does a detailed study of the text of Scripture, it is not inevitable that he will come to any particular view on the method of salvation.

In the preceding discussion, we demonstrated to be invalid the charge that a dispensationalist must hold one or the other view regarding single or multiple methods of salvation. However, that does not answer the question of what a dispensationalist should hold. Obviously, what he should hold is whatever Scripture actually teaches, regardless of what positions could be made to fit with his system. That being the case, what should he hold? Given what Scripture actually says, it

would seem that a dispensationalist should hold to multiple methods of salvation if and only if Scripture, when interpreted according to literal hermeneutics as the dispensationalist understands such, teaches such a view. In view of the comments in Galatians 3:11 about the law, and in view of Hebrews 11, which teaches that Old Testament saints were saved by faith, it would seem that a dispensationalist should not hold that more than one method of salvation is taught in Scripture. Of course, the dispensationalist may be inconsistent in his hermeneutics, and in that case a multiple methods view would be understandable (but wrong). However, if he interprets Scripture by the method his system tells him to use, then he will not in fact hold to multiple methods of salvation. Happily, most dispensationalists, for whatever reason, do hold that only one way of salvation is taught in Scripture. To that view I also subscribe.

Having come to this point, we have indeed accomplished much. We have established that (1) it is the consensus of both dispensationalists and nondispensationalists that Scripture teaches only one method of salvation, that (2) dispensationalism as a system, contrary to the views of some, does not necessitate multiple methods of salvation, even though it could fit such a position, that (3) dispensationalism also fits with a single method of salvation view, and that (4) a dispensationalist, to be consistent with his foundational principle, should hold that only one method of salvation is taught in Scripture.

But what is that one method of salvation? There are many differing opinions on that subject. The disagreement does not lie in the matter of whether salvation is by faith or works. Dispensationalists and nondispensationalists agree that it is by faith. Hebrews 11 lists the great Old Testament heroes of the faith and indicates that they were saved by faith. Moreover, as one studies the list, it becomes obvious that those included represent different stages in the progress of God's revelation concerning himself and His plan of salvation. Both dispensational and nondispensa-

[p.50]

tional interpreters agree that in all ages God had graciously required of man faith, not works. Oehler states the matter nicely when he writes:

The law, by always pointing back to God's electing grace, and onward to God's just retribution, as the foundation of the righteousness of the law, presupposes faith, i.e. such a trusting submission to the covenant God as was exhibited in Abraham's believing adherence to the Divine promise. This is in conformity with that fundamental declaration, Gen. xv. 6, "He believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness".... Accordingly the requirement of faith runs through the entire Old Testament. The leading of Israel, from the time of its deliverance out of Egypt, Ex. iv. 31, xiv. 31, comp. especially Deut. i. 32, ix. 23, and many other passages, rests entirely on faith. But in proportion as its Divine election seemed to human apprehension thwarted, and the promise of redemption forfeited, by the apostasy of the nation and the judgments thereby incurred, the more emphatically is it asserted how all-important faith was, as the root of all righteousness, and the condition on which the blessing was to be obtained.<sup>13</sup>

Faith, then, is recognized by all as requisite for salvation. But faith in what or whom? At this point opinions diverge. That divergence does not fall neatly along the lines of dispensationalism

versus nondispensationalism. Even those working within the same broad system of theology do not entirely agree on this matter. But there is a nondispensational approach that has many affinities to other nondispensational positions (though not identical to all such positions).

The position of Charles Hodge on this issue is most helpful, for he not only claims that faith is the key, but he also explains in detail what the revealed content of faith is at all times. Hodge begins by explaining that in all dispensations, Jesus Christ is the Redeemer. He writes:

It is no less clear that the Redeemer is the same under all dispensations. He who was predicted as the seed of the woman, as the seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the Branch, the Servant of the Lord, the Prince of Peace, is our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, God manifest in the flesh. He, therefore, from the beginning has been held up as the hope of the world, the SALVATOR HOMINUM.<sup>14</sup>

Hodge's statement is most interesting. On the one hand, I can agree with parts of it, for in a certain sense which I shall mention, I hold that, indeed, Christ is the Redeemer at all times. On the other hand, it is another thing to say that Jesus Christ is the One who from the beginning "has been held

[p.51]

up as the hope of the world." If Hodge means nothing more than that Christ's work is the ground of redemption for all ages, I have no problems. If, on the other hand, the statement means that Jesus Christ has literally been the revealed content presented to men from the very beginning, I have tremendous problems. It is definitely debatable as to how much understanding there was of the full import of the prophecies about the Messiah or how much the truth about Christ's coming redemptive work was involved in the presentation of the gospel in the Old Testament. What does not seem to be the case is that men consciously believed in Jesus Christ, for we do not find until the New Testament the explicitly stated revelation that Jesus of Nazareth is the long-awaited Christ. Although it is always possible that the Holy Spirit could have revealed the truth about Jesus to an eager seeker, it seems to overlook the progress of revelation to say that knowledge of Jesus was universally or even widely known in Old Testament times. Consequently, when Hodge specifies the content of faith, he goes too far. He writes:

As the same promise was made to those who lived before the advent which is now made to us in the gospel, as the same Redeemer was revealed to them who is presented as the object of faith to us, it of necessity follows that the condition, or terms of salvation, was the same then as now. It was not mere faith or trust in God, or simply piety, which was required, but faith in the promised Redeemer, or faith in the promise of redemption through the Messiah.<sup>15</sup>

Although I would not want to deny that God revealed as early as Genesis 3:15 that One would come to take care of the sin problem, I find it very hard to accept the notion that the promise of redemption through Jesus Christ was so clearly understood or so exclusively held to be the sole revealed content of God's method for handling sin, as Hodge seems to think. It seems that those who hold this view are so concerned to uphold the unity of God's redemptive program that they do not entirely do justice to the truth of the progress of revelation. Moreover, if there were no other way to uphold the unity of God's redemptive work, I suspect I would be drawn to this view,

but as I shall point out, there seems to be a satisfactory way to uphold the unity of redemption without weakening the truth of progressive revelation.

Some might object that Old Testament believers obviously knew the truth about Christ, in light of passages like 1 Peter 1:11-12 and Hebrews 11:13. At the outset, let me make two points. First, I am not denying that God could have revealed the truth about Jesus to Old Testament saints. But I doubt that He did on any widespread basis. The passages in ques-

[p.52]

tion do not state that He did. Second, even if someone like Hodge is correct, and even if the dispensationalist agrees with Hodge, I do not see that such an eventuality would necessitate abandoning dispensationalism. Since dispensationalism is not about whether Christ was the revealed content of faith in the Old Testament, a dispensationalist can certainly hold that He was, without having to surrender his dispensationalism.

Now, what does 1 Peter 1:10-12 actually say? According to verse 11, the Old Testament prophets wanted to know what the Holy Spirit was revealing about the kind of time (*poion kairon*) it would be and the kind of events there would be (*tina*), when the Holy Spirit informed them of the sufferings of the Messiah. What is obvious from this verse is that Old Testament saints did know about a coming suffering Savior. No one disagrees that such information was available. But it seems erroneous to conclude on the basis of this passage that they knew that Jesus of Nazareth would be that suffering Messiah. In verse 12 we are told that in response to their questions, the prophets learned essentially that the time of fulfillment was not their own time. They were prophesying of things that would occur in the lifetime of others. Certainly, there is no statement to the effect that they were or were not informed that the Messiah would be Jesus of Nazareth. They may have been so informed, but 1 Peter 1:10-12 neither proves nor disproves that. Arguments from silence are consistent with everything and consequently prove nothing.

When we turn to Hebrews 11:13, we find a similar case to that of 1 Peter 1:10-12. The verse speaks of many Old Testament saints who, through the time of Abraham, died without seeing the promises of God fulfilled, though they were aware of those promises. Considering the promises made through the time of Abraham, it becomes clear that God had revealed that some day a redeemer would come to put away sin. It is not stated that the redeemer would be Jesus of Nazareth. Consequently, it would be entirely possible for the saint to see the promises, as verse 13 says, and still not know about Jesus. It would also be possible that he had been told about Jesus. But Hebrews 11:13 does not say whether these saints in fact did or did not know about Jesus of Nazareth. Again, the argument from silence is inconclusive.

In summarizing this matter, Payne's comments are helpful in gaining a proper perspective of the issue. Payne writes, "Union with Christ is the only way of salvation; and 'Christ in you, the hope of glory,' was a 'mystery' that was hidden to the Old Testament saints (Col. 1:27) only in respect to the exact knowledge of the Savior's Person, and not in respect to its practical efficacy."<sup>16</sup> Though I cannot fully agree with Payne's perspective on the relation of union with Christ to the Old Testament

[p.53]

saint, I agree with his comments about knowledge of Jesus in the Old Testament.

The basic objection to a position like Hodge's is that it does not seem to pay adequate attention to the implications of progressive revelation. Consequently, the Old Testament saint seems to be granted more revelation and more understanding of revelation than Scripture seems to indicate he actually had.

### **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SALVATION**

Is it possible to give proper weight to the progress of revelation without fragmenting the redemptive plan of God to the point of claiming that God operates according to multiple ways of salvation? I should like to argue that a commitment to allowing the truth of progressive revelation to hold its full weight does not necessitate a subscription to multiple methods of salvation. In order to support this claim, I shall present what I take to be God's one method of salvation, operative throughout Scripture. At the outset, it would seem to be crucially important to understand that though God always uses the same method of saving men (the point which preserves unity of redemption and of the redeemed), what He reveals about that method is progressively amplified and necessitates changes in the way the believer expresses the fact that he has appropriated God's one method of salvation (the points that allow for the diversity demanded by progressive revelation). The full import of this statement will be understood as I unfold what I take to be God's method of salvation.

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.

[p.54]

God works, then, in a gracious way to save people. But how does He express that grace? In other words, what specific gracious thing(s) has God done to save men? In order to understand God's gracious dealings in saving men, it would seem helpful to make and explain some key distinctions.<sup>17</sup> I should like to distinguish between the basis, or ground, of salvation, the requirement for salvation, the ultimate content of salvation, the specific revealed content of salvation to be

accepted, and the believer's expression of his salvation. The first three are constant throughout all dispensations, whereas the latter two change. This approach, as we shall see, allows for unity of salvation without ignoring the progress of revelation and God's different administering orders for the world. It should also be noted that the first item deals with the objective work of God which provides and pays for salvation so that it is available to be offered, whereas the latter four focus on items involved in the subjective application of salvation to the believer and his life as a believer.

## **BASIS, OR GROUND, OF SALVATION**

God has graciously acted in an objective way so that man can be saved. What He has done constitutes the basis, or ground, of salvation. In other words, because of this act, God can extend salvation to men at all times. The basis of salvation is nothing other than God's gracious provision of the death of Christ. The reason that Christ's death must be the basis is stated in Leviticus 17:11, according to which blood must be shed, if there is to be atonement for sin (cf. Heb. 9:22). But not just any blood fully and finally removes sin. If so, one could argue that the blood of sacrificial animals fully and completely removes sin. However, the writer of Hebrews explicitly states that the blood of bulls and goats could not take away sin, for only the blood of Christ could do that (Heb. 10:4ff.). The implications of this verse for the significance of Old Testament sacrifices will be discussed more fully later. At this point, suffice it to say that the verse implies that animal sacrifices could not in any dispensation be the ultimate basis for God's removal of sin. Moreover, there is no indication whatsoever in Scripture that the blood of a human being would atone for sin. Therefore, since God demands the shedding of blood for removing sin, and since no human or animal blood will suffice to atone for sin fully, the ultimate ground, or basis, upon which God can offer salvation at any time in history has to be the sacrifice of Christ.

Christ's sacrifice is the ground, but what does that involve? First, it does not mean that at all times in human history the death of Jesus Christ was already a historical fact. Though God decreed the event prior to history, it still had to be accomplished within history. It did not become a historical fact until it actually occurred. Second, claiming that Christ's

[p.55]

death is the ground of salvation does not mean that at all times in history God had revealed that the death of Jesus of Nazareth is the sole basis for granting salvation. It is most unlikely that anyone knew that before His advent. Progressive revelation must be given its due. What is meant by saying that Christ's death is the ground of salvation is that from God's perspective, the sacrifice of Christ is the objective act on the grounds of which God offers salvation in any age. In trying to understand how this can be so before the event occurs historically, we must distinguish between God's perspective and man's. God has known about Christ's death from all eternity. Since He decreed it, it was an accomplished fact in His thinking long before it was an accomplished fact in history. Because God knows that the deed will be done (since He decreed it), and because He sees all of history (including the completed work of Christ) at once, God can grant man salvation, even before the sacrifice is performed in history. There could never have

been a time in human history when God would learn that He had been mistaken about the fact that Christ would sacrifice Himself for sin. Although there is no past, present, or future for God, He, as an omniscient being, cannot help but know what is past, present, and future for the creatures He has made. Thus, God always sees Christ's work as an accomplished fact. But before it was done within history God knew that the death of Jesus Christ had not been accomplished in history. Man, limited by his human perspective, did not know about the atoning work of Jesus Christ until God revealed it and then accomplished it within human history.

In sum, in order to gain a proper perspective on this matter, one must avoid two mistakes, both of which involve confusing God's perspective with man's. The first error is thinking that God neither knows nor sees any more than we do. The people of the Old Testament era did not know that Jesus was the Messiah, that Jesus would die, and that His death would be the basis of salvation. But that is not to say that God did not know. God did know at all times that Christ's death was as good as accomplished. Consequently, He could grant salvation on the basis of it. The second error comes from assuming that because God understood the full import of the death of Jesus and granted salvation on the basis of it, everyone in the Old Testament also must have had that information and must have understood it. I see no reason that God's knowledge and man's must have coincided on this issue before Jesus. I see no indication that at all times God's and man's knowledge of these matters totally coincided.

## **REQUIREMENT OF SALVATION**

This refers to what is required of man in order for him to be saved (although God enables man to do what he does). It does not refer to what

[p.56]

God must do either objectively or in the subjective application process in order for man to be saved. Scripture is very clear that no one is saved by attempting to perform a good act in his own power. In fact, no one on his own is capable of an act that is righteous in God's eyes (Psalm 14:3; Rom. 3:10-12). It is certainly doubtful that even Adam, before the Fall, totally on his own without any divine enablement was capable of performing any act of moral good in God's eyes. When Adam did act on his own, he committed the first sin (Gen. 3). Not only is it futile to attempt to gain salvation by good works in general, but as Scripture teaches clearly even complete adherence to the Mosaic law (difficult as that would be) would not justify anyone (Gal. 2:16; 3:11). Performance of religious rites simply for the sake of the rite will not save anyone, for God desires something else (Psalm 51:16-17). According to Scripture, the sole requirement for salvation is that man exercise faith in the provision that God has revealed. Faith is not to be considered a meritorious work on man's part, for Scripture affirms everywhere that faith, as all of salvation, is God's gift to man (Eph. 2:8; Rom. 6:23; 2 Tim. 2:9). There is no question that faith is clearly taught as the sole requirement for salvation in the New Testament. Equally clear is the message that faith was the only prerequisite during Old Testament times. Even if one were to miss that point from a study of the Old Testament, he could hardly miss the explicit teaching in Hebrews 11 on what men in the Old Testament period did to be saved. God always requires that man respond in faith to whatever He reveals concerning salvation.

## **ULTIMATE CONTENT OF SALVATION**

Scripture is very clear about this matter. The ultimate object of faith in any and every age is God Himself. The ultimate issue at any time in history is whether a man will take God at His word and exercise faith in the provision for salvation which God reveals. The message of Hebrews 11 is again instructive, for it repeatedly emphasizes that each hero of faith did what he did because of his faith in God (cf. Rom. 4:3). Moreover, it is interesting to note that the prophets do not call the backslidden people to return to the sacrificial system or even to a renewed belief in the promises of God. Instead, the plea is to return to God (Jer. 3:1, 12, 14, 22; 4:1; Ezek. 33:11; Hos. 12:6; 14:1; Joel 2:12 are examples of the prevalence of this message in the prophets).<sup>18</sup> Clearly, whatever religious rites, good works, and so on a person might begin or resume, and whatever promises he might reaffirm, the repentant sinner was ultimately turning or returning to God. In all times, He is the ultimate object of faith. Even today when we ask men to believe in Jesus Christ as their personal savior, we are asking for an ultimate commitment to God. He is the one who has

[p.57]

revealed that salvation is available through faith in Christ. Moreover, a rejection of Christ constitutes a refusal to believe God's word about Christ; it is a rejection of God Himself.

## **SPECIFIC REVEALED CONTENT OF SALVATION**

All the items discussed so far have remained constant as the dispensations changed. But not everything in regard to salvation is constant. It seems clear that the specific revealed content to be believed changes at various times in history. One may believe that at all times men have believed in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, for salvation. But still he cannot deny that at various times God has given more information than previously specified about that Christ. For the one who does not hold that men at all times have consciously known about and believed in Jesus, the conclusion that the specific revealed content changes is especially clear. There are several key points in connection with this matter.

First, it is important to remember that since in each economy the content is what God has revealed, belief in the content for that age is belief in the ultimate object of faith, God. The believer is ultimately trusting God when he responds positively to the truth for his dispensation: believing in the promises (age of promise), agreeing that God will forgive and cleanse the sin of the one who in faith offers sacrifice (age of law), or placing his faith and trust in Jesus as Savior (age of grace). Thus, it is not, for example, the performance of the sacrifices or a belief in the sacrificial system per se that saved someone living under the Mosaic law. Instead, what saved a person then was a commitment to the God who had revealed that sin was to be expiated through sacrifices made in faith that God would give atonement. Therefore, in agreeing to respond positively to the specific content for any given age, the believer was ultimately responding to the God who revealed the content. Romans 4:3, for example, says that Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness. Of course, someone might respond, "He believed the

promises, didn't he?" Certainly, he did, but the point is that in doing so, he was believing the God who gave the promises.

The second point about the content of revealed truth is especially important. The content of faith is cumulative throughout Scripture. This should not seem strange in view of progressive revelation, but nonetheless, it needs explanation. There must be a message at all times (a gospel, so to speak) which tells men about God and His plan for salvation and urges them to respond. From the beginning through the time of the law, the information that God had revealed about salvation (information that could have been put into a message, even if it never was in terms of all it involved) was cumulative as revelation progressed. This means that an

[p.58]

individual was not to ignore whatever God had said about Himself and His method of salvation in previous ages. (The amplification of revelation might require that man express his faith in different ways. However, that is a different matter that I shall discuss shortly.)

Thus whatever God has presented to be believed in one age may be amplified and/or supplemented in another age, but it is not canceled. For example, the person responding in faith for salvation under the Mosaic law is also responding to the God of the promises to Abraham, the God of the Exodus, the God of the Noahic covenant. Consequently, the believer living in the time of the Mosaic law is not to ignore that a reason for believing in God is that he has given certain promises to Abraham that are also applicable to the one under law. He may emphasize in his thinking what God has done for Israel most recently, but whatever God had said and done previously is not unimportant. All are reasons for faith. Even if the believer did not understand that he was committing himself to the God who had done all these things and revealed all these things about Himself in the past, nonetheless, he was making a commitment to such a God. It makes no sense to say that someone living in the time of Abraham, for example, believed the content of the promises, but that nothing else God had ever said was part of the content. Moreover, Galatians 3:12ff. states clearly that the promises that Abraham believed were not and could not be annulled just because God revealed the law to Israel (Gal. 3:16-17). These are just some examples in support of my contention that the content of faith during the Old Testament times was cumulative.

The advent of the age of grace maintains a certain continuity. What the Old Testament pointed toward is fulfilled in Christ. When a person believes in Christ as Savior, he is committing himself (whether or not he recognizes it) to the God who brought Israel out of Egypt and the God who gave the Mosaic law. It is the same God, and thus, the specific content of faith can be seen to be cumulative throughout the whole of Scripture. The emphasis in the age of grace is, of course, on what God has done through Christ. In fact, the gospel message may not even include a comment about what God had done for Israel in the past. However, since what God has done through Christ is the culmination of what He had done and said previously, the believer during the age of grace is committing himself to the God of the promises, the God of the Exodus, the God of the Mosaic law, and the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, even if the believer, when he responds, does not understand that, since the emphasis of the message is on Christ.

An example of a message that included a rehearsal of all God had done in the past is Stephen's speech (Acts 7). Granted, the speech was an indictment against his listeners. But the indictment is so strong because

[p.59]

Stephen appeals over and over to what God had done for Israel throughout history and to Israel's refusal to believe him. Stephen completes his indictment by pointing to the fact that this same God whom Israel had rejected has now sent Christ. Just as they should have trusted God in the past but did not, so they were in Stephen's time rejecting God and His Messiah. Stephen's speech met a negative response. Nonetheless, the cumulative emphasis of his speech seems most instructive in regard to the matter before us.

### **OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES**

In order to understand the idea of cumulative content more fully, we must know what that content was. Two broad strands run throughout the Old Testament content presented to man as the reason for placing faith in God.

First, the entire Old Testament (viewed as comprising several dispensations or not viewed dispensationally at all) teaches that blood sacrifice is of utmost importance in order for man to maintain a right standing before God. (The exact soteriological relevance of these sacrifices will be discussed later.) This teaching appears before Leviticus 17:11. As early as Genesis 3:15, it is seen that someone must die in order ultimately to defeat sin. The theme of sacrifice is continued in Genesis 3:21. God covered Adam and Eve with animal skins. Obviously, animals had been killed to provide this covering. In Genesis 4, Abel's blood sacrifice was acceptable to God, whereas Cain's offering was not. It seems that Cain demonstrated disbelief in refusing to bring a blood sacrifice. In view of Genesis 3:21, the information about blood sacrifice would have been available to Cain. He chose to ignore it and thereby expressed his rejection of God and of his method of coming to Himself. During the time of Noah (Gen. 8:20), sacrifices were still important. God did not abrogate that revelation. Certainly, during the time of Abraham, sacrifices were of crucial importance in man's relation to God. We see Abraham sacrificing to God on various occasions (e.g., Gen. 12:7-8; 13:3-4). The Abrahamic covenant itself was ratified with Abraham as God passed among the pieces of the sacrifice on the altar (Gen. 15). In subjecting Abraham to the ultimate test of his faith, God requested him to sacrifice his son Isaac (Gen. 22, a passage that beautifully prefigures Christ's sacrifice). When God redeemed Israel from Egypt, a lamb was slain, and its blood was applied to the doorposts of the houses. Clearly, during the age of promise, sacrifices were significant. With the giving of the Mosaic law, sacrifices were still important. The system of sacrifices became more elaborate, as the kinds of sacrifices to be given and the uses of such sacrifices were

[p.60]

delineated. Finally, during the time of law it became more clearly evident that a person would have to be sacrificed for sin (Isa. 53; Dan. 9:24-26). God's suffering servant, the promised

Messiah, would have to die for the sins of His people (cf. Dan. 9:24-26—commentators generally agree that in order for the things mentioned in verse 24 to be accomplished, Messiah the prince would be cut off, as mentioned in verse 26).

In addition to the theme of sacrifice, there is the theme of promises. Some promises concern salvation from sin and thus overlap the theme of sacrifice. Others are of a national, political, and social nature. Walter Kaiser has argued that the theological center of the Old Testament canon is the notion of promise.<sup>19</sup> One can hardly read Kaiser's work and not be convinced that the concept of promise is crucially important for the whole of Old Testament life.

Thus we see that in each period of the Old Testament economy, the specific content revealed for men to believe involved truths about sacrifices and promises. The change of dispensations did not abrogate existing promises but rather supplemented and amplified them. Passages such as Genesis 3:15-16, Genesis 9 (Noahic covenant), Genesis 12 and 15 (Abrahamic covenant), Deuteronomy 28-30 (Palestinian covenant), 2 Samuel 7 (Davidic covenant), and Jeremiah 31 (New Covenant) show that even though dispensations changed, God did not abrogate His promises. He amplified and clarified them.

Promises were not only important in terms of believing that in the future God would do what He promised. They were also important from the standpoint of past fulfillment. The ways God had demonstrated His faithfulness in the past formed a basis for trust in Him for salvation and for fulfillment of promises in the future. Paul states very clearly that the giving of the law did not nullify the promises made to Abraham (Gal. 3:16-17). God's revelation concerning His promises is cumulative.

The specific content to be believed, then, was cumulative, and it was composed of two major components: sacrifice and promise.<sup>20</sup> The believing Jew, therefore, whether he understood what he was doing or not, was committing himself to the God of the promises, the God who had faithfully formed the nation of Israel and brought her out of Egypt and into the land, and the God who had revealed all along that sin could be atoned for by means of blood sacrifice. This is what it means to say that the content of faith in the Old Testament is cumulative. The person who committed himself in faith to that God, and all that He had revealed about His saving and keeping power, was saved.

But only since the time of Jesus Christ has the revealed content to be believed coincided entirely with the basis, or ground, of faith. During the age of grace, God has revealed the fulness of salvation through the shed

[p.61]

blood of Jesus Christ (the basis of salvation in any age). Neither God's acts in history nor His revelation concerning His acts had given man the complete content about Christ. We must be careful not to think that during the Old Testament economy it was necessary to accept the content over and over again to be saved. For example, one might think that since during Old Testament times a sacrifice was required for each sin, the person was being saved with each sacrifice. As we shall see, such a view is a misunderstanding of the function of Old Testament sacrifices as well as

a confusion of the requirement for salvation with the expression of faith that a saved person would make. Moreover, merely doing sacrifices never justified anyone. What did justify the repentant sinner was a one-time commitment to the God who had revealed that sin was to be atoned for by blood sacrifice (as well as whatever else He revealed for that economy). The Old Testament believer might fall out of fellowship with the Lord and need to return to Him, but there does not seem to be an indication that once a person was saved he could lose that salvation and needed to be saved over again.

## **BELIEVER'S EXPRESSION OF SALVATION**

Just as the specific content of faith changes as revelation progresses (the content is cumulative), so there is an aspect of change in regard to the fifth element of salvation, the believer's expression of his salvation. It is crucially important not to confuse this element with the requirement for salvation. The requirement (faith) confronts a nonbeliever as he contemplates God's message of salvation. The specific expression of faith confronts the believer as he contemplates how he is to live out the salvation he has already been given. It is his way of responding to God in obedience as evidence that he has already believed.

The believer's expression of faith must take into consideration at any given point in history three kinds of elements. First, elements that are constant, such as the moral law. Since the moral law reflects the nature of an unchanging God, it, too, is always binding. Thus, at all times, a believer is to express the fact that he is saved by adhering to the moral law. Such adherence will not save him; but it will provide evidence that he already has met the requirement of salvation. Second, in any given age, there seem to be elements that conclude with a given age. A good example of this is the bringing of animal sacrifices. Through the time of the Mosaic law, the offering of such sacrifices was important as the believer expressed his trust in God. However, with the advent of the age of grace, the believer no longer expresses his devotion to God through bringing animal sacrifices. There are ways by which he can receive cleansing from sin as a believer and express his devotion to God, but animal sacrifice is not one of

[p.62]

them. Finally, there are items in the believer's expression of his faith that commence in a given age. For example, in the age of grace the believer can express his obedience to the Savior through observance of the Lord's Supper and baptism. Before the age of grace, such expressions of faith were not open to the believer.

A final point in regard to the expression of faith is simply to reiterate that though it may change from one age to another, it does not entail a change in God's one method of saving men. How could it, since it has nothing to do with what God and the nonbeliever do in order to bring the nonbeliever to the point of (in New Testament terms) conversion, regeneration, and justification? In the previous pages, I have suggested what I take to be God's one method of salvation as taught by all of Scripture. Even the items that vary from one dispensation to the next (specific revealed content of faith and expression of faith) do not necessitate multiple ways of salvation. Moreover,

it seems obvious that one could hold the kind of position I have espoused and remain a consistent dispensationalist. Nothing mentioned seems to contradict anything essential to dispensationalism.

Our discussion so far has stressed the unity in God's method of salvation. But is anything different (besides the items mentioned) about being a believer in Old Testament times, as opposed to New Testament times? Certainly the method of salvation is the same, but is everything else equal as well? This question is important for a proper understanding not only of the two testaments, but also for a proper conception of the distinctions between biblical Judaism and biblical Christianity. Moreover, in specifying the differences between the two, we want to be careful not to contradict what has just been presented, that is, we do not want to derive differences that will necessitate multiple ways of salvation, since it has already been argued that God uses only one way. What, then, seem to be the key differences?

The first and obvious difference is that the content of faith presented to the believer and the expression of his faith differ, as has been noted. Second, the believer's relation to the law has changed (an aspect of the change particularly involved in the expression of his faith). The Mosaic system distinguishes between the moral law, the ceremonial law (rules and regulations regarding clean or unclean, as well as the whole sacrificial system and all the regulations about the Tabernacle, for example), and the civil law (application of the moral law to certain features of Israel's community life).<sup>21</sup> But the New Testament believer in Jesus Christ is no longer under the civil law or the ceremonial law. God's standards of morality do not change. The two testaments take different approaches toward obedience to the law. Put simply (perhaps too

[p.63]

simply), the Old Testament approach can be characterized as "do and you shall live," whereas in the New Testament the approach seems to be "you are; therefore, do." But the oft-heard comment that in the New Testament believers keep the law out of love, obviously implying that Old Testament believers kept it out of obligation, is not consistent with passages such as Psalm 119: 16, 35, 47, 70, 77, 92, 143, 174, which speak of delight in the commandments of the Lord.

Third, the New Testament believer receives a much greater enablement for obedience to God in virtue of the indwelling Holy Spirit. The Old Testament speaks of the Holy Spirit coming upon a person for a special endowment of power for a particular task (e.g., the case of Saul as recorded in 1 Sam. 10:6; 11:6; and 18:12; the case of craftsmen working on the Tabernacle as noted in Exod. 31:1-11; Micah as recorded in Mic. 3:8; the seventy elders as recorded in Num. 11:16-17, 24-30; and in the cases of some of Israel's judges as seen in Judg. 3:10; 6:34; 11:29; 13:25; 14:6, 19; 15:14). But there is no mention of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as found in the New Testament (Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Tim. 1:14; 1 John 3:24).<sup>22</sup>

Fourth, the ἐν Χριστῷ (*en christō*) relationship, union of the believer with Christ, is part and parcel of the New Testament believer's salvation, whereas that relationship does not pertain to salvation of an Old Testament saint. Such union with Christ is accomplished by means of the ministry of the Holy Spirit whereby He baptizes the believer into the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). But the Holy Spirit did not begin to perform that ministry until the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Finally, though there was forgiveness for sin in both the Old and the New Testaments,<sup>23</sup> sin was only fully and finally paid for when Christ made His sacrifice. This point is fully developed and explained below.<sup>24</sup>

## SOTERIOLOGICAL FUNCTION OF OLD TESTAMENT SACRIFICES

At this point, I should like to consider the function of the sacrificial system in the Old Testament. In particular, I am interested in clarifying the soteriological function of Old Testament sacrifices.

The Mosaic system of sacrifices is very complex, and it is not always easy to distinguish the meaning and function of the various sacrifices. Nonetheless, for our purposes it would seem possible to clarify at least some of the different offerings that Scripture mentions. First, there is the עֹלָה ('*ōlā*) or burnt offering (Lev. 1; 6:8-13). Payne suggests that this offering was the "continual burnt offering" (mentioned in Exod. 29:38-42) and that it symbolized the idea of complete and continuous atonement and consecration.<sup>25</sup> Second, the מִנְחָה (*minhâ*) or meal offering (Lev. 2; 6:14-23) symbolized especially the devotion of one's person and property

[p.64]

to the Lord.<sup>26</sup> Third, there is the category of offerings designated as peace offerings (Lev. 3; 7). Three offerings fall under this category, i.e., the thank offering, the vow, and the freewill offering. Oehler distinguishes the three as follows:

The זֶבַח תּוֹדָה [*zēbah tôdâ*] being offered without having been previously promised for some benefit received, and thus referring to a favor not already supplicated..., was the highest among the שְׁלָמִים [*sh'lamîm*]. The vow, נֶדֶר [*neder*], on the contrary, is a promised offering usually presented after the reception of some benefit previously entreated; yet the one making a promise might connect an offering immediately with his prayer, and it would fall under this species; but the נֶדֶר [*neder*] always refers to something distinctly prayed for. And lastly, the נְדָבָה [*n'dābâ*] is every free gift for which there was no other occasion than the will of the offerer, whom his heart impelled to show his thankful sense of all the blessings which the goodness of God had bestowed on him.<sup>27</sup>

The final three offerings are the sin, guilt, and trespass offerings. The precise distinction between the three is a matter of debate, a debate that lies beyond the scope and purpose of this study. Suffice it to say, these are the offerings that deal specifically with atoning for sin.<sup>28</sup>

What does the Mosaic system teach about the meaning of these sacrifices? In other words, how are they to be understood? What is their purpose? Unfortunately, there is no unanimity in regard to the meaning of sacrifices. In examining this topic, we shall consider it from two distinct perspectives, (1) that of the idea behind the sacrifice, and (2) that of the relation between the sacrifice and the sacrificer.

The idea behind *sacrifice*. Here there is indeed no unanimity. Oehler is helpful in speaking of the basic idea of pre-Mosaic sacrifice, although our main concern is with the Mosaic system. He claims the ideas of expiation and atonement are not the most significant ideas behind pre-Mosaic sacrifices (although they are hinted at). Oehler writes:

The pre-Mosaic offerings had the signification of *thank-offerings and offerings of supplication*, though a propitiatory element is connected with the burnt-offering (first mentioned Gen. viii. 20) lying in the רֵאֵחַ נִיחֹֿהּ [rêah nihôh] (literally, odor of satisfaction), through which the sacrifice has an appeasing effect, see ver. 21. Offerings for atonement, in the strict sense, are not mentioned in the Old Testament before the introduction of the Mosaic sacrificial law. The book of Job, too, which brings before us the customs of the age of the patriarchs, represents, in chap. i. 5, xlii. 8, the presenting of burnt-offerings for sin

[p.65]

committed, and avoids the term כִּפֶּר [kipper], which denotes expiation in the terminology of Mosaic sacrifice (giving, instead, the more general term שָׁדַד [giddash]).<sup>29</sup>

According to Oehler, the offerings were not expiatory in the strict sense because "an expiatory offering, in the strict sense, presupposes the revelation of divine holiness in the law, and the entrance of the people into covenant relation with the holy God."<sup>30</sup> But it would seem that expiation in the strict sense is not part of pre-Mosaic sacrifices. Nonetheless, expiation is present in some sense, as even Oehler's evidence indicates. Of course, he is also correct in pointing out the significance of thanksgiving and supplication in many of the offerings.

J. Barton Payne delineates four different approaches to sacrifice, and rejects the first three. First, some of a liberal persuasion have suggested that sacrifice was intended to be a meal, nourishing the deity (cf. Gen. 8:20). As Payne suggests, this theory does not square with Old Testament teachings, for among other things, Psalm 50:9-13 and Isaiah 40:16 indicate that God has no need of sacrifices for any purposes.<sup>31</sup> Second, there are those who understand Old Testament sacrifices as gifts. Payne points, for example, to Vos's claim that the two main ends served by sacrifice are expiation and consecration.<sup>32</sup> Payne claims that although there is an element of truth in this conception, it does not explain the necessity for blood. It is estrangement from God that necessitates blood, not the desire to consecrate oneself.<sup>33</sup> It is interesting that Payne does not focus on the fact that Vos specifies both expiation and consecration. He restricts his comments solely to the matter of consecration. Third, the Canaanites viewed sacrifice as a means of communion with deity. Such communion was specifically physical, i.e., they considered themselves to be eating the blood of the deity, for example. As Payne accurately responds, "Though Scripture surely believes in communion with God (Exod. 24:11), this blessed communion transpires in a moral and spiritual sphere only. It arises, moreover, as a result of the sacrifice, not as the explanation by which to account for the sacrifice."<sup>34</sup> Finally, Payne argues that the correct explanation of the matter is that sacrifices were propitiatory, or atoning.<sup>35</sup> It seems to me that all of the notions of expiation, propitiation, and consecration are involved in sacrifices. That the sacrifices were atoning can hardly be denied. The kinds of sacrifices required necessitate that atonement for sin was one of the ideas behind sacrifices. Reflection on the kinds of sacrifices

(peace offerings, for example) suggests that the ideas of consecration and worship are involved as well.

But why could such sacrifices atone? As Elliott notes, sacrifices per se, apart from underlying spiritual motivation, could not bring atonement.

[p.66]

Jeremiah's complaints against sacrifice (Jer. 7:21-26) are to be interpreted not as teaching that sacrifice and the sacrificial system have no value, but that without a repentant and obedient heart, the offering of a sacrifice is worthless from the standpoint of atonement.<sup>36</sup> God never has been and never will be satisfied with mere ritual.

The relation between the sacrifice and the sacrificer. Again, we find varying interpretations. This is especially true in the case of those sacrifices given in order to make atonement for sin. Vos outlines three basic theories in relation to the matter of the offerer's relation to the offering. First, he outlines what might be called the "no theory" theory. According to this view, held by many of the Wellhausen school of criticism, neither the Old Testament in general nor the law in particular present any coherent, consistent theory of sacrifice.<sup>37</sup> The second view is what Vos calls the purely symbolical theory. According to this theory, the process of sacrifice portrays certain things that must be done to the offerer and will be done. Consequently, this view holds that what must take place is entirely internal or subjective to man. As Vos states, this interpretation of the sacrifices sees them much along the same lines as do the moral and governmental theories of the atonement in relation to Christ's sacrifice.<sup>38</sup> The final theory is the symbolico-vicarious theory. In comparing it to the purely symbolic theory, Vos writes:

If the latter assumes that the further steps continue to portray what will be done within man to modify this, the symbolico-vicarious theory presupposes the recognition by ritual itself that nothing can be done in man himself with the proper effect, and that, therefore, a substitute must take his place. All the successive acts of the ritual apply to this substitute, not to the offerer. It becomes something done, to be sure, for the benefit of the offerer, but done outside of him. It will thus be seen, that the objectivity and the vicariousness of the process go together. On the same principle adoption of the purely symbolical theory carries with itself exclusion of the vicarious element and of the objectivity.<sup>39</sup>

The third of these theories is clearly supported by such passages as Genesis 22:13; Leviticus 1:4; 16:21-22; 17:11; 19:20, 21; and Numbers 6:11. In spite of such evidence, however, Gerrish claims that the substitution theory cannot be upheld. What is clear, according to Gerrish, is that "the offering is one with which the worshipper can by faith *identify himself*, not so much an offering which bears his punishment *in his stead*."<sup>40</sup> Thus, Gerrish holds that the theory presented is representative, not substitutionary. Although it is true that the offerer is identifying himself

[p.67]

with the sacrifice, it would also seem clear that the sacrifice is given in his place. Such passages as those mentioned above would seem to confirm this point.

The Old Testament teaching on sacrifices seems to indicate that the sacrifices included four basic functions or usages.

First, the sacrifices served a governmental or theocratic function. (Obviously, before the time of Moses no such function was served.) This function corresponds to the civil part of the law. Under the Mosaic system, the Israelite was related to God by physical birth as a Jew through the theocracy. God was the ruler in Israel. Even when Israel had kings or judges, God was still the ultimate ruler. Consequently, when a person sinned, such sin affected not only his relation to the one who saved him (God), but also to the one who was the ruler in Israel (God). Thus, sin was a governmental as well as a spiritual matter. As a result, the purpose of offering was not merely to restore one's relationship with his God, but to insure his right standing within the theocracy. The kinds of sacrifices that were most relevant to this were the sin, guilt, and trespass offerings. In addition, sacrifices seem on at least two occasions to have played a "political function" in that they were offered as the country prepared for or was in the midst of a war (1 Sam. 7:9ff; 13:8ff.). The type of sacrifices most relevant to this were those not used specifically for atoning for sin (the broad category of sacrifices that Payne calls sweet savor sacrifices). If someone committed a sin that became a civil issue, he could be restored to his rightful place theocratically or governmentally by bringing sacrifices. However, by bringing such sacrifices, he did not automatically give indication of spiritual salvation or restoration at all. His sacrifice, if done without repentance toward God, might meet the external requirements for restoration to the community, but it need not be anything more. It might serve a purely civil function. Consequently, the theocratic or governmental use of the sacrifices carried no particular soteriological implications and no particular relationship to the sacrifice of Christ, other than a typological one.

A second function of the sacrifices in the Old Testament was a typological function. Sacrifices at all times during the Old Testament had this function. Hebrews 10:1, speaking of the Mosaic law and its sacrifices, says that the law is not the image (εἰκὼν, *eikōn*), that is, the exact representation, of what was to come, but it was a shadow (σκιά, *skia*) of it. In contrasting the meaning of the two words Wescott writes:

The words contain one of the very few illustrations which are taken from art in the N.T. The 'shadow' is the dark outlined figure cast by the

[p.68]

object—as in the legend of the origin of the bas-relief—contrasted with the complete representation εἰκὼν, *eikōn*] produced by the help of colour and solid mass.<sup>41</sup>

Bringing meaning of the words out of the realm of art and into the context of our discussion, we can see how the figure of the Old Testament sacrifices being a shadow actually carries the idea of their being a foreshadowing of something to come. Given this kind of language, the writer of Hebrews seems to be stating that the Old Testament sacrifices were a type of what was to come in Christ's sacrifice.

It is important to distinguish between the typological truth present in the Old Testament sacrifices and the degree of understanding of the typological truth possessed by the Old Testament believer. Even though it must be granted that sacrifices from the time of Adam prefigured the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, it is moot as to how many people during Old Testament times understood all of this. As revelation progressed, more information was given so that in the sacrifices one could discern a prefiguring of a Messiah who would be sacrificed, even if no one (unlikely) in fact ever did fully understand that typology. The point is that although the Old Testament sacrifices were invested with typological significance, there is no warrant to say that the individual by bringing such sacrifices was showing that he placed his faith and trust in Jesus Christ, or even necessarily in a coming Messiah, for salvation. He may have understood that they pointed to a Messiah. However, from the standpoint of what God had revealed, as I have argued throughout, it seems most difficult to accept the notion that the Old Testament believer perceived that the sacrifices pointed to Jesus of Nazareth. The second point in regard to the typological function of the sacrifices is that even though they foreshadowed Christ's sacrifice by type, the typological nature per se of the sacrifices neither saved nor cleansed anyone. In other words, the typological function of the sacrifices was just that, typological; it was not soteriological.

A third function of the sacrifices was their role in worship. Obviously, by bringing a sacrifice for atonement (a non-sweet-savor sacrifice) and thereby agreeing with God's revealed means for handling sin, the believer was performing an act that brought glory to God. However, those sacrifices (sweet-savor sacrifices) that were not brought in order to secure atonement for sin, seem to be involved in the act of simply worshiping one's God (Lev. 2:2, 9—grain offering; Lev. 3—peace offering; 1 Sam. 1:3—example of an 'occasion on which worship and sacrifice are connected). Obviously, such sacrifices did not necessarily have any soteriological function. As to their relationship to Christ's sacrifice,

[p.69]

Payne has sketched some of the ways in which these sacrifices have foreshadowed Christ and the believer's relation to Him.<sup>42</sup>

A fourth function of the sacrifices was their role in soteriology, or their soteriological function. In regard to this matter, there are many pitfalls to be avoided. First, the sacrificial system in the Old Testament has a relation to the initial reception of salvation (what in New Testament terminology would be referred to as the point of justification), but it is not what many might think it is. It is clear that merely performing sacrifices never saved anyone. In fact, even if the sacrifices were offered in faith with a repentant heart, the public offering aspect of the sacrifice itself did not give the offerer salvation. As we have already seen, the sacrifices were part of the ceremonial aspect of the law. As Paul says in Romans 3:20, no one is justified by doing the works of the law. If the sacrifices qua sacrifices did not justify (whether given with a repentant heart or not), what, then, was their relation to a person coming to salvation? In accepting the God of Israel for personal salvation, the believer was not committing himself to the sacrifices for salvation, but to the God who had revealed that such sacrifices were to be the means of handling sin. The natural outworking of such saving faith in God was the performance of the sacrifices in believing faith, since God had said that He would cleanse the sin of the one who brought such sacrifices.

Although the Old Testament sacrifices had a relation to justification, their main function, soteriologically speaking, was in the sanctification process. Certainly, the sacrifices that were brought in worship of God or in consecration of the individual (sweet-savor sacrifices) would strengthen the believer's relationship with God. However, offering sacrifices in believing faith also brought cleansing from sin and the restoration of fellowship with God. Performing substitutionary and expiatory sacrifices seems to be more involved with cleansing the sin of a believer than with bringing a person to salvation. Job, when he offered a sacrifice for cleansing (Job 42:7-9), was obviously saved at the time he gave the sacrifice (the Old Testament abounds with such examples). The expiatory sacrifices, then, seem to be primarily involved with the sanctification process rather than having a soteriological function.

Again, we must recognize that merely giving sacrifices, without a repentant heart and a believing attitude that God would forgive, would not suffice to atone (Ps. 40:6-10; 51:10, 16ff.; Isa. 1:11-15; Micah 6:6-8). The case of Job is most helpful in this respect as well. Before Job offered the sacrifice, he had already repented of his sin in dust and ashes. A comparison of sanctification in the Old and New Testaments would show that when the New Testament believer sins, in order to restore fellowship with the Lord he must receive cleansing from the sin. In order to continue

[p.70]

to grow, he must confess his sin in believing faith that on the basis of Christ's sacrifice God will cleanse him from sin (1 John 1:9). The Old Testament believer also confessed his sin, but in addition, he brought in believing faith a sacrifice, since God had revealed that sin would be handled in that way. Before Christ's sacrifice, the public offering had to accompany the repentance of the believer. Once the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ had been made, the repentant believer need not give another sacrifice in order to have cleansing.

When sacrifices were presented with repentant faith, did the offerer actually receive forgiveness at that time? The Old Testament clearly teaches that sacrifices brought in repentant faith did result in God's forgiveness being granted, as seen in Leviticus 1:4; 4:26-31; 16:20-22; 17:11; Psalms 25, 32, 51, 103, 130; Isaiah 1:18; Ezekiel 18:22 in the Old Testament and Hebrews 9:13 in the New Testament.<sup>43</sup> This stands in clear opposition to the idea that the Old Testament teaches that unintentional sins could be atoned for and forgiven, whereas intentional sins (sins committed "with a high hand") could not be forgiven.<sup>44</sup> Careful study of the Old Testament does not support such a claim. Kaiser put the matter well when he wrote:

How many sins could be atoned by such a system in Israel? All sins of weakness or rashness were capable of being atoned whether they were done knowingly or unwittingly. Leviticus specifically affirmed that the trespass offering was for sins such as lying, theft, fraud, perjury, or debauchery (Lev. 6:1-7). And on the great day of Atonement (Yom Kippur), "all" the sins of "all" Israel of "all" who had truly repented ("afflicted their souls" [Lev. 16:16,21,29,31]) were forgiven. Indeed the most persistent phrase in the Levitical sacrificial instructions was the assurance: "And he shall be forgiven" (Lev. 1:4; 4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 16; 16:20-22). Therefore, the old but false distinction between witting, i.e., "sins done with a high hand," and unwitting, i.e., as it was explained, sins done in ignorance of what the law said on the matter, was unwarranted. The unwitting sins *בִּשְׂגָאָה* (*bish'gāgāh*), or better still, sins "in error," involved all sin which sprang from the weakness of flesh and blood. But the sin of Numbers

15:27-36, the sin of a "high hand" **יָד רַמָּה** 'TIn (*b<sup>e</sup>yād rāmā*), was plainly that of rebellion against God and His Word.... This is what the NT calls blasphemy against the Holy Spirit or the unpardonable sin. It was high treason and revolt against God with the upraised, clenched fist: a picket against heaven! But this was not to be put in the same class as sins of murder, adultery, or the like. Treason or blasphemy against God was much more serious. Rather, it attacked God Himself.<sup>45</sup>

[p.71]

Israel repeatedly rebelled against God and went after strange gods. Such sin certainly was not unintentional. Nonetheless, the constant message of the prophets to the people is to return unto the Lord. Why would God urge the people to return to Himself for forgiveness and restoration if atonement for their sin was an impossibility?<sup>46</sup>

Thus we see that the sacrificial system was useful in the sanctification process, and that the one who offered sacrifices in believing faith did receive forgiveness. As a matter of fact, at that time offering sacrifices was crucial to retaining a right relationship with God. As Hobart Freeman has so aptly written:

...sacrifice was not to the Hebrew some crude, temporary, and merely typical institution, nor a substitute for that dispensation until better things were provided by revelation, but as will be shown, sacrifice was then the only sufficient means of remaining in harmonious relation to God. *It was adequate for the period in which God intended it should serve.* This is not the same as saying Levitical sacrifice was on an equal with the sacrifice of Christ, nor that the blood of bulls and goats could, from God's side, take away sins: but it is recognizing the reality of the divine institution of Mosaic worship, and looking, as too often Old Testament interpreters fail to do, at sacrifice from the viewpoint of the Hebrew in the Old Testament dispensation. Sacrifice, to the pious Hebrew, was not something unimportant, of simply a perfunctory ritual, but it was an important element in his moral obedience to the revealed will of God.<sup>47</sup>

So, it can be demonstrated that Old Testament sacrifices did result in forgiveness of sin. Someone might then suggest, "Let's continue the sacrificial system now. It would suffice for sin, wouldn't it? In fact, it's as efficacious as Christ's sacrifice, isn't it?" The answer is that although sacrifices were once the means for maintaining a harmonious relation to God, continuing such sacrifices would mistake the relation of those sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice and miss the importance of Christ's sacrifice. The answers to the imagined questions show something of the soteriological relation of Old Testament sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice

There are several important aspects to the relation of the Old Testament sacrifices to Christ's sacrifice. First, Scripture is very clear that the system of the law, including the sacrifices, is superseded and done away with by the sacrifice of Christ (cf. Gal. 3:24-25; the book of Hebrews). Second, as we have seen, Old Testament sacrifices actually covered sin and assured the believer of cleansing and forgiveness. However, it was the sacrifice of Christ that actually once and for all removed the sin (Heb.

[p.72]

9:13; 10:4, 11-14). If Old Testament sacrifices had actually made a full and final objective payment for sins so as to remove them totally, then it could not be said that Christ's sacrifice paid for such sin. Of course, that would contradict the fact that Scripture teaches that Christ's sacrifice did pay for the sins of all men (Heb. 2:9; 7:27; 10:10; Rom. 6:10; 1 Pet. 3:18). In fact, such a position would even contradict a passage in the Old Testament itself, i.e., Isaiah 53:6. If all sins in the Old Testament economy are completely removed by animal sacrifice, then it makes no sense for an Old Testament prophet to write that the Lord laid on Him (the Messiah) the iniquity of us all. Even if one refused to interpret the passage messianically and chose to see it fulfilled in Israel, for example (that is, one claims that "him" is Israel), the passage still would make no sense if sin in the Old Testament were ultimately being removed by animal sacrifice. Because Christ's sacrifice was not the first act in human history does not mean that its efficacy does not extend to every sinful act of history. Old Testament sacrifices were, so to speak, the down payment for sin, whereas Christ's sacrifice was the full and final payment. Why, once the sacrifice of Christ pays the debt in full owed for sin, continue to make "down payments" on sin? The sacrificial system must be done away with.

The Old Testament sacrifices pointed to (typological function) the sacrifice of Christ, which would fully handle sin (even if the Jew did not understand the typology of the sacrifices). On the ground of His sacrifice to which the Old Testament sacrifices pointed, the Old Testament believer who in repentant faith brought a sacrifice could be assured that God would cover, cleanse, and forgive such sin (soteriological function). But the objective deed, from God's standpoint, that would completely pay for and remove sin was only offered on Calvary.

Another reason that Old Testament sacrifices are not to be continued is that we can see that the scope of the respective sacrifices greatly differs. Under the Old Testament system, the general rule was that when a sacrifice for sin was made, sin was actually forgiven, but only the sin for which the sacrifice was made was expiated. Of course, the sacrifice made on the Day of Atonement covered more than just one sin, but even so, it did not cover all sin of all time. On the contrary, the word of Scripture in regard to Christ's sacrifice is that it is all-inclusive, once for all, never to be repeated (Heb. 10:12, 14). Certainly, if Christ's one sacrifice pays for all sin, there is no need to go back to Old Testament sacrifices. What could they possibly add, since Christ's sacrifice already provides atonement for *all* sin?

There are many misunderstandings and seeming contradictions about the subject of Old Testament sacrifices. Someone might state that everything that has been said is contradicted by Hebrews 10:4: "It is impossible

[p.73]

for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." Moreover, the problem seems to become more complicated by Hebrews 9:13, which indicates that the blood of bulls and goats did cleanse from sin. There seems to be a tremendous contradiction between the two passages as well as with the content of the preceding discussion. The seriousness of the problem can be seen in that one could incorrectly assume that Hebrews 10:4 means that no one in the Old Testament period was actually saved, that Old Testament believers had to await the sacrifice of Christ before their faith

was actually "validated," when they became saved (even though dead), or that there really was no forgiveness of sin when it was repented of. These problems can be resolved by a proper understanding of the verses and concepts involved.

First, Hebrews 9:13 does not relate to internal cleansing and forgiveness from sin. As Westcott notes, the verse is actually referring to "the ceremonial purity which enabled the Jew to enjoy the full privileges of his covenant worship and fellowship with the external Church of God."<sup>48</sup> With the exception of the comments about the "Church of God" I find myself in full agreement. In fact, verse 14 contrasts Christ's sacrifice with that of bulls and goats and shows that His sacrifice gives internal cleansing, whereas that of bulls and goats is, according to verse 13, relevant to external cleansing (ceremonial cleansing). Of course, Hebrews 10:1-4, refers primarily, if not exclusively, to internal cleansing from sin. Therefore, Hebrews 9:13 and 10:1-4 cannot be in contradiction, because they are not referring to the same kind of cleansing for the same purpose.

Though Hebrews 9:13 does not refer to internal cleansing from sin, it is incorrect to assume that sacrifices in the Old Testament were relevant to ceremonial cleansing only, and thus did not really bring forgiveness of sin. We have already examined many passages from the Old Testament that indicate there was internal cleansing and forgiveness from sin. Moreover, Hebrews 10:4 seems to be talking in its context not about external, ceremonial matters, but internal matters. But, by resolving the apparent contradiction between Hebrews 9:13 and 10:4, we have not removed the problem altogether.

A final resolution to this difficulty seems to be possible only in the light of two crucial distinctions. The first is the distinction between the provision of atonement (the objective work of God) and the application of the atonement (the subjective work of God). The second is the distinction between the forgiveness and the removal of sin. In regard to the first distinction, in order for a person to be saved, two conditions are necessary: (1) someone must provide and pay for the basis of that salvation, and (2) someone must take the salvation that has been purchased and apply it to the sinner in need of salvation. The former aspect, providing and paying

[p.74]

for the salvation is called the objective aspect of God's atoning work. It is what He had to do as a basis for offering and applying salvation to any specific person. It is a work that is performed externally to all subjects (persons), and in that respect it is called "objective." When the objective work has been performed, salvation is potentially available to the sinner. The basis for salvation has been provided, so that it is possible to be saved. However, just because salvation is provided does not mean that anyone is in fact saved. The actualization of that salvation in the life of the individual can only come when God has applied that salvation to the person. Since this aspect of salvation is done within the life of the person (subject), it is called the subjective aspect of salvation.

In regard to the difference between removal of sin and forgiveness of sin, we can say, using the terminology set forth above, that the removal of sin refers to the payment for sin, the objective aspect of salvation. On the other hand, forgiveness comes when God applies salvation to the subject or cleanses him from sin. Thus, it refers to the subjective side of salvation. That there is a

genuine distinction should be clear in that one can objectively pay for sin's removal even if no one applies that salvation to himself, whereas no one's sins are actually forgiven until he subjectively applies what has been provided for him objectively. Moreover, it is possible to cover (through partial objective payment via animal sacrifice) and forgive a sin without completely objectively paying for and removing it.

With those two distinctions in mind, we can resolve our problem. In Hebrews 10:4 the writer states that the blood of bulls and goats cannot remove sin; it does not state that when such sacrifices were given, there was no forgiveness. The testimony of the Old Testament is that there was forgiveness when sacrifices were given in faith. The point, then, must be that mere animal sacrifices, though acts external (objective) to the sinner, could never from God's perspective take care of the objective dimensions of the atonement. Only Christ's objective work could provide the full and final payment for salvation from sin and make it potentially available (we can now see better why the sacrifice of Christ had to be at all times the objective basis, or ground, for salvation). Thus, Old Testament sacrifices could only in type foreshadow His sacrifice. They could not pay for sin so as to remove it; only the sacrifice of Christ could do that. However, that did not mean that the sacrifices were totally worthless, for there was still the subjective side of salvation (in addition, the sacrifices gave a "down payment" on sin-objective function), that is, the need for application of the atonement and, in particular, for forgiveness. On the basis of the believer's trust in the revealed content for faith for his particular age, God could and did subjectively apply salvation and forgiveness to the repentant sinner. Thus, the problem can be resolved. When

[p.75]

the objective work of a sacrifice was given, it could not fully and finally pay for sin (the provision of atonement). Hebrews 10:4 is upheld. Nonetheless, since it had been given in faith and obedience to what God had revealed for that age, God could and did grant the sinner forgiveness (subjective side of salvation) on the ultimate grounds of Christ's sacrifice, which would someday be given. All the Old Testament comments about forgiveness of sin can be upheld. In fact, it would seem that this resolution does the most justice to all the verses involved. We do not conclude that Old Testament sacrifices had the same amount or kind of efficacy as did the sacrifice of Christ, but neither do we derive the unwarranted conclusion that during Old Testament times no one was saved or no one's sins were cleansed and forgiven.<sup>49</sup>

This study, then, has investigated some key issues pertaining to the topic of salvation in the Old Testament. As we reflect upon the unity and the diversity within God's gracious plan of salvation for all time, we can only repeat what Paul said as he reflected on the mercy of God, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! ... For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (Rom. 11:33, 36).

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James K. Zink, "Salvation in the Old Testament: A Central Theme," *Encounter* 25 (Autumn 1964):407. Zink explains that the term "salvation" has three basic meanings in the Old Testament: (1) national salvation in the sense

of protection from foes and deliverance from exile, (2) individual salvation from the results of sin, deliverance from enemies, disease, and trouble, and (3) eschatological salvation from sin issuing in a richer life in communion with God in the present world and in the afterlife.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (London: James Clarke, 1960), 2:367.

<sup>3</sup> J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), p. 241. See also pp. 72-74.

<sup>4</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, "The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism" (Th.D. diss., Northern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1957), pp. 144-45. See also pp. 151 and 144-81.

<sup>5</sup> Payne, pp. 467-68. See also J. Barton Payne, *The Imminent Appearing of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 31-32, for a more blatant statement on this issue.

<sup>6</sup> C. I. Scofield, ed., *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1945), p. 1115.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1245.

<sup>8</sup> Fuller, pp. 153ff.

<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), pp. 113-16.

<sup>10</sup> E. Schuyler English, ed., *New Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford U. Press, 1967), p. 1124.

<sup>11</sup> Ryrie, pp. 44-46.

<sup>12</sup> George E. Ladd, "Historic Premillennialism," in *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views*, ed. Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1977), pp. 20-21, 27.

<sup>13</sup> Gustav F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, reprint (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978) p. 459.

<sup>14</sup> Hodge, p. 370.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 371-72. See also Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 241, and Hodge, p. 372, who writes, "The Apostle proves that the specific promise which was the object of the faith of the patriarch was the promise of redemption through Christ. That promise they were required to believe; and that the true people of God did believe."

<sup>16</sup> Payne, *Imminent Appearing*, p. 128.

<sup>17</sup> The basic format is suggested in Ryrie, pp. 123-26. However, I am modifying and amplifying it. The fifth element in this series and some aspects of its amplification were suggested to me by Paul D. Feinberg.

<sup>18</sup> Snaith points out that in the Old Testament God is portrayed as the savior; see Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (New York: Schocken, 1975), pp. 85-86. For the concept of God as the object of faith, see also Henry McKeating, "Divine Forgiveness in the Psalms," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (March 1965): 78.

<sup>19</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), pp. 20-40. Kaiser elaborates this theme throughout the book.

<sup>20</sup> God's ethical standards, of course, run throughout the whole Old Testament, but they give man an awareness of God's standards and man's own failure. They are not per se part of the content to be believed as one trusts God for salvation.

<sup>21</sup> Kaiser, pp. 114-18.

<sup>22</sup> Oehler, p. 462.

<sup>23</sup> I shall elaborate this point in the following portion of the chapter.

<sup>24</sup> It would also be appropriate to note that in the New Testament the eternal destiny of the believer is stated much more clearly than in the Old Testament. Redemption of the whole person, including his body, and glorification of the believer indeed are stresses in the New Testament that are seldom mentioned in the Old Testament. This does not mean, though, that Old Testament believers are not to be resurrected and glorified. This is simply to point out a difference in amount and content of information available in the Old Testament as opposed to the New Testament, not a difference in the final status of the Old Testament saint.

<sup>25</sup> Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 386.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Oehler, p. 288.

<sup>28</sup> For discussions of the distinctions see Oehler, pp. 300-303; Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, pp. 386ff.; Norman H. Snaith, "The Sin-Offering and the Guilt-Offering," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (January 1965); and Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 188-89.

<sup>29</sup> Oehler, p. 263.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, p. 382.

<sup>32</sup> Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 173.

<sup>33</sup> Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, pp. 382-83.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 383.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ralph H. Elliott, "Atonement in the Old Testament," *Review and Expositor* 59 (January 1962):15.

<sup>37</sup> Vos, p. 177.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 176-77.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>40</sup> Brian A. Gerrish, "Atonement and 'Saving Faith'," *Theology Today* 17 (July 1960): 188.

<sup>41</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), p. 304.

<sup>42</sup> Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament*, pp. 385-88.

<sup>43</sup> See McKeating article. See also Elliott, p. 25, on the idea of the suffering servant's sacrifice bringing forgiveness.

<sup>44</sup> See Hobart Freeman, "The Problem of Efficacy of Old Testament Sacrifices," *Bulletin of Evangelical Theological Society* 5 (1962):74 for explanation of three views concerning the efficacy of Old Testament sacrifices.

<sup>45</sup> Kaiser, pp. 117-18.

<sup>46</sup> Snaith, "Distinctive Ideas," pp. 84-85. Snaith shows that God forgives in spite of Israel's sin of rebellion.

<sup>47</sup> Freeman, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> Westcott, p. 261. See also p. 260.

<sup>49</sup> I was greatly aided in coming to my resolution of this problem by the comments of Kaiser, p. 118, and Freeman, pp. 76-77.