

**SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:  
WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE OBJECT AND  
CONTENT OF PERSONAL BELIEF**

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All too frequently many Christians either assume, or boldly claim, that the method by which individuals were converted and received salvation in the Old Testament (hereafter OT) was much different from what was known in the Gospels and Epistles of the New Testament (hereafter NT). Perhaps the most programmatic statement of the challenges that were eventually to emerge in the area of missiology and the (various cases for) inclusivism of peoples, who through no fault of their own, had never heard of Jesus as redeemer, was the one given by Charles Ryrie in 1965. He claimed that:

The *basis* of salvation in every age is the death of Christ; the *requirement* of salvation in every age is faith; the *object* of faith in every age is God; the *content* of faith changes in the various dispensations.<sup>1</sup>

The key point to notice is that the object of faith was not Christ, or any of the scores of names that referred to the Messiah in the OT: it was God. But when the object of faith was stated to be God, what usually was meant was that the person merely adopted a theistic point of view, i.e. one that affirmed that there must be a God, but little more anything.

Likewise the *content* of salvation in the OT fluctuated, depending

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965), 23. Italics are Ryrie's own.

what era one was in during OT times. Thus the popular thought developed that OT persons could lay claim to an OT salvation without having a personal knowledge or trust in the coming man of promise, the "Seed," the Messiah. It was this ambiguity that opened the door for others to argue in our day that many remote or "hidden peoples" in the world, who are "informationally B.C.,"<sup>2</sup> could also lay claim to eternal life with the Savior even though they could only point to the fact that there must be a God somewhere.<sup>3</sup>

These "informationally" uninformed peoples can be credited with salvation because, so most contemporary Christians believe, that is what the OT saints understood about being "saved" in the OT.

While it must be admitted that there was progress in revelation, and more detail was given in the NT, yet our study in this essay will conclude that the process of conversion in both testaments shared more similarities than most believers have thought was possible. This was especially true with regard to the *object* of faith: God was the object of faith in the OT and continues to be the object and focus of faith today. Thus, the arguments being made today in the name of God's mercy, grace, and his provision for those who have never heard about his name among the unevangelized, with its redefining the boundaries of inclusivism, are rather wide of the mark set by biblical revelation in both the Old and New Testaments, since they are based on the false

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<sup>2</sup>This term comes from Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1979), 254 where Kraft asked: "Can people who are chronologically A.D. but knowledgewise B.C. (i.e., have not heard of Christ), or those who are indoctrinated with a wrong understanding of Christ, be saved by committing themselves to faith in God as Abraham and the rest of those who were chronologically B.C. did (Hebrews 11)? Could those persons be saved by 'giving as much of themselves as they can give to as much of God as they can understand?' I personally believe that they can and many have."

<sup>3</sup>The two most widely read recent books claiming this thesis, or variations of the same, are: Clark H. Pinnock. *A Wideness in God's Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) and John Sanders. *No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

premise that OT salvation had a different object and a different content as the grounds on which the hopes of the OT believers rested.

Salvation in the OT<sup>4</sup> may be summarized as follows; it was: (1) by means of grace, (2) through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, (3) by putting one's trust in the coming Man of Promise, who was the "Seed" of Eve, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. (4) Forgiveness and cleansing from sin were provided for by the "blood" (i.e., by a life yielded up in death) of a substitute, which pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of a substitute who was yet to come, and resulted in (5) a justification by faith, and (6) a sanctification to a life of holiness, with (7) a hope of the resurrection from the dead. Each of these clauses is worthy of a fuller demonstration and exposition from the text of the OT itself.

#### *Salvation by Means of Grace (Exodus 34)*

It is rather surprising for some to hear that the OT has enveloped its message of salvation in grace rather than in works. But some of the most profound and tender expressions of the love of God are to be found in the OT. Rather than expressing this love and grace of God in abstract terms as the Greek language prefers, Hebrew has chosen to put

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<sup>4</sup>For a more complete list of articles and chapters on "Salvation in the Old Testament," see my forthcoming article entitled, "salvation and Atonement: Forgiveness and Saving Faith in the Tanak," in *To the Jew First: The Place of Jewish Evangelism in the On-Going Mission of the Church* Ed. Vernon Grounds (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). The most outstanding articles and chapters on this theme, however, would be: Ralph H. Elliott, "Atonement in the Old Testament," *Review and Expositor* 59 (1962): 1-15; Hobart Freeman, "The Problem of Efficacy of Old Testament Sacrifices," *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 5 (1962): 73-79; John S. Feinberg, "Salvation in the Old Testament," in *Tradition and Testament: Essays in Honor of Charles Lee Feinberg*, eds. John S. Feinberg and Paul D. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 39-77; Fred H. Klooster, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Continuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Il.: Crossway Books, 1988), 131-160; and T. V. Farris. *Mighty to Save: A Study in Old Testament Soteriology* (Nashville, Tn.: Broadman Press, 1993).

it into concrete terms.

The favorite Hebrew term to depict the unsolicited and inexplicable grace of God for his people is 'ahab, "to love." While this word is fairly rare in cognate Semitic languages, it is rather frequent in Hebrew. Usually it is found in those contexts where God has set his unconditional love on Israel. The classic text on the love of God is probably Deut 7:7 — The LORD did not set his love on you and choose you because you were more numerous than any other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (My own translation).

God dealt with Israel on the basis of his gracious love. No other explanation can fit or match what took place: noting from a human point of view could be said to merit or to attract the attention or the love of God. It was simply a matter of his own matchless grace, and nothing else. But this grace has to be appropriated by faith before it became effective for the individual.

But there is another set of Hebrew words that set forth the same grace of God just as elaborately as did the word "love." The Hebrew word נָחַם, meaning "to bend," or "to stoop," then "to be favorable to" and "to be gracious to." Related to this word is the noun חַסֵּד, "unmerited favor," and the best word of all, רַחֲמִים. This last word is one of the most beautiful words in all of the OT. It appears some 248 times, but is the most difficult of all words to translate into other languages, for it really refers to God's "mercy," his "loving kindness," his "loyal fidelity," his "covenantal love," and most characteristic of all these possible translations: his "grace." There is not the slightest obligation on God's part OT show his "grace" or "unmerited favor" to anyone. No one can force his hand, as it were, by performing certain good works or by working up such a string of obedient acts so that God would be duty-bound to grant his favor whether he wanted to do it or not. Instead, God grants his favor despite what anyone naturally deserves to those who trust him as their Savior.

God initiated this love and committed himself to follow through with it. Thus it was that he established the first covenant, i.e., the one that was first to be fully operative in Israel, the Mosaic Covenant,

which covenant was said to be full of "grace and truth" (Exod 34:6 ["abounding in love/grace and faithfulness/truth"]; cf. John 1:17 ["For the law through Moses was given; *grace and truth* in Jesus Christ happened"]) -- my literal translation to bring out that Moses was merely the transmitter of God's law while grace and truth took on flesh and blood in the person of Jesus Christ). That same grace of our Lord went on to establish the Abrahamic-Davidic-New Covenant as well.

Some have incorrectly thought that there was too much dissimilarity between the grace of God given in the NT and the grace of God revealed in the OT. One usually finds such bad evaluations of grace in the two testaments when they come to explaining a biblical text such as the story of the rich young ruler in Matt 19:17. One well known commentator drew these incorrect conclusions:

True to the Jewish dispensation [read: the OT], [Jesus] said with reference to the law of Moses: 'This do and thou shalt live;' but when contemplating the cross and Himself and the bread come down from heaven to give life for the world, He said: 'this is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent' (John 6:29). These opposing principles are not to be reconciled. They indicate the fundamental distinction which must exist between those principles that obtain in an age of law, on the one hand, and age of grace, on the other hand.<sup>5</sup>

But this is far off the mark of the repeated claims of the OT for the grace of God. To further complicate the issue, this same author distinguished between the presentation of the gospel in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) and the presentation of the gospel given in John. The former offered life as a future blessing, whereas John offered it as a present blessing. Or to put it in the words of this author: "One was offered, and is yet to be granted, on the basis of faithful law-keeping works: the other is gained only through the grace which is in Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>6</sup>

Did not Paul, however, argue in Romans 4 that both Abraham and

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<sup>5</sup>Lous Sperry Chafer, *Grace* (Chicago: Moody, 1947), 92.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

David were justified solely on the basis of faith by grace, and not on the basis of "law-keeping works?" Indeed, Paul triumphantly shouted in Gal 2:21b, "If righteousness could have been gained through the law, Christ died for nothing." Such a "law-keeping works" method of earning(?) one's salvation never was available -- not in the synoptics, or in the OT! No such offer of the gospel ever existed -- it did not even exist in a hypothetical way!

The case of the rich young ruler is not used fairly as a basis for identifying what is normative in OT salvation, for the lawyer's question had as its working assumption the Pharisaic doctrine of self-justification by works. He wanted to reduce everything to "what *one thing* must I *do*" (Luke 10:25-37, emphasis ours). He betrayed the fact that he thought he could *earn* his salvation by something he did. Jesus apparently decided not to challenge his false assumptions, but, instead, to meet him on his own grounds and in this way Jesus demonstrated how the young man stood condemned even on those very grounds, much less the biblical grounds.

Jesus designed a special test for a particular case in order that he might show the absurdity to anyone who might even think that he could earn God's favor and eternal life. Thus, the Bible *reports* what this rich young ruler said, but it *does not teach* that at all. Salvation is simply through the grace of God, and not by any law-keeping works.

### *Salvation Through the Regenerating Work of the Holy Spirit*

Even though it is not always a simple matter to show just how, in detail, the Holy Spirit worked in regeneration and sanctification in the OT,<sup>7</sup> there can be no question that every new birth before the advent of the cross of Christ was effective only through the work of the Holy Spirit.

One of the clearest entry points into this doctrine is to examine the

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<sup>7</sup>See Geoffrey W. Grogan, "The Experience of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments," *Vox Evangelica* 5 (1967), especially pp. 12-17. Also see J. C. J. Waite, *The Activity of the Holy Spirit Within the Old Testament Period* (London: London Bible College Annual Lecture, 1961).

One of the clearest entry points into this doctrine is to examine the conversation that our Lord had with Nicodemus in John 3. Jesus reminded Nicodemus, even though he was still living under the economy and in the days of the OT, that is he wished to have eternal life, he would need to be "born again" and to be born "of the spirit" (John 3:3, 5, 8). When Nicodemus expressed surprise at such startling news, it was our Lord's turn to express amazement that this man could be "a teacher of the Jews," and yet he did not know that salvation was the work of the Holy Spirit and a matter of being born again. Where had this man gone to Yeshiva or Seminary that he did not know these things?

Yet if we ask where such things might be taught in the text of Scripture, the answer was in Ezk 36:25-32, with its teaching on the "new heart" and "new Spirit."

Another crucial text in this discussion of the Holy Spirit in the OT is Ps 51:11 -- "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation." It is doubtful if David is concerned about losing the Holy Spirit's gift of government as he leads the nation of Israel, which came upon him at his anointing from the Spirit of the Lord (I Sam 16:13-14). The context of Psalm 51 is against such a limited interpretation of the gift, for David had just prayed, "Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Thus, as A. B. Simpson commented, David's mention of the Holy Spirit in this text referred to the divine One who "will come into the heart that has been made right, and dwell within us in His power and holiness."<sup>8</sup>

The NT passages about the coming of the Holy Spirit fall into two main groups. The first group deals with the promise of the Holy Spirit who would assist those who would later compose the NT, i.e., the apostles. The Holy Spirit would remind the apostles of everything that had happened in Jesus' life (John 14:26), of all of Jesus' works (John 15:26-27), and of the doctrine that belonged to the Father (John 16:12-15). These texts should not be confused with the work of the Holy Spirit in other individual's lives, but were the promise of the NT canon to come.

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<sup>8</sup>A. B. Simpson, *The Holy Spirit*, 2 vols. (Harrisburg: Christian Publications, n.d.), I:137.

The second group of texts in the NT on the coming of the Holy Spirit point to a new and distinctive work of the Holy Spirit who would come and baptize with fire (Matt 3:11 [and the synoptic parallels]; John 1:33; Acts 1:4-8; 11:15-17; 15:8). What the gospels and the book of Acts anticipated, Paul's letter to the Corinthians sees as completed in I Cor 12:13, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body..." Thus the new work to which these texts pointed came somewhere between the two terminal points set by the gospels and this Pauline epistle to the Corinthians. Since in Acts 1:5 this event was to happen "not many days" off, that baptism of the Holy Spirit most naturally must have referred to the Jewish Pentecost in Acts 2, the Samaritan visitation of the Spirit in Acts 8, and the Gentile inclusion in the body of believers in Acts 10. This work was, therefore, that act whereby the Holy Spirit visibly incorporated for the first time all who believed, and then included all who subsequently believed throughout this present age, into one body of Christ, his universal Church.

But what about the role of the Holy Spirit in the NT? A third group of NT texts must be investigated. Here the text of John 14:16-17 is extremely important. Just prior to our Lord's crucifixion, he announced the following in the Upper Room discourse:

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another counselor to be with you forever -- the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him or knows him. But you know him, for he lives *with* [Greek *παρά*] you and *is* [or *ἔσται*] in you (emphasis mine).

The resolution of the tense of the verb "to be" — "is," or "will be" — in you, is most important for the understanding the fact and the extent of the Holy Spirit's presence in the believer in the OT. Is the correct reading of the Greek text a future verb (*ἔσται*) or is it a present tense (*ἔστί*)?

If one chooses the more difficult reading, as we are taught to do in cases of textual difficulties like this (since our tendency is always to level off to the simplest or easiest reading), then the present tense is to be preferred. Thus our Lord was teaching that the Holy Spirit is already indwelling the believer in this pre-cross situation (in other words, during OT times). Moreover, the use of the preposition *παρά*, "with," does not point to a fluctuating relationship, but to one of permanence,



παρά was used (John 14:23).

An even more difficult text is in John 7:38-39.

Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him. By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

How can it be true at one and the same time that the Holy Spirit was in the OT believer and that the Spirit had not yet been given? The answer is probably to be along the lines that Goodwin indicated when he saw a difference between the internal and quiet coming of the Holy Spirit in the individual OT believer during the era prior to NT times, and, the coming of the Holy Spirit "in state, in solemn and visible manner, accompanied with visible effects [just] as [the coming of] Christ [was accompanied with visible effects]...", and whereof all the Jews should be, and were, witnesses."<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Goodwin's argument, which seems correct to me, is that just as it was necessary to have Christ's visible act on Calvary, even though all the OT saints were saved by believing proleptically in this coming work of Christ, just so, it was also necessary to have the visible work of Pentecost. At that time the Holy Spirit, who had been working all through the OT, would also come in state, visibly, and with effects that could be witnessed by all to signal the new advance in the work of the Holy Spirit, as suggested in the other group to NT texts about his new work.

### *Salvation Grounded in the Man of Promise (Genesis 15)*

There is the strongest evidence possible in Gen 15:1-6 that the object of faith was no one other than the coming Son of God. In that sense, then, the same one who was the object of faith in the OT is the one who remains just the same even up to the present. Acts 4:12 had said that "Salvation is found in none else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." And that is

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<sup>9</sup>Quoted by George Smeaton, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: 1958), 49 from T. Goodwin, *Works* (Edinburg: 1861), VI:8.

precisely what we find in the OT. Therefore, those arguments for the so-called heathen that have never heard being offered a reduced plan that allows them to merely believe that there is a God to whom they are ultimately obligated, because the OT persons were allowed to come to faith on this basis, are again wide of the mark set by the Scriptural text of the OT.

The key text is Gen 15:6. "And [Abraham] believed to LORD and [God] accounted it to him for righteousness." This text must not be limited to the fact that faith and belief in general (or even in the mere fact that there is a God or even that there is only one God) were the means of coming to salvation in the OT and that the object of faith was merely "the LORD," or "God." That interpretation, popular as it is in many circles, is wrong in that it violates the evidence from the context. Instead, Abraham's faith focused on the promise God had just given in verses 2-5: it was a faith in the promised "Seed" that would come through Abraham's line in the future.

T. V. Farris disagreed with our analysis. He advised that:

Verse 6, following immediately [vss 2-5], would suggest that Abraham's faith was in response to the preceding promise [about God's provision of a 'Seed']. The syntactical form of the verb 'believed,' however, precludes that interpretation. The precise nuance of the syntax formula used in this instance, the conjunctive *vav* plus a perfect form of the verb, is a matter of dispute among Hebrew grammarians...<sup>10</sup>

Allen P. Ross likewise wished to separate verse 6 from its context in Genesis 15:2-5 by observing that the NIV left the conjunction untranslated "to avoid the implication that verse 6 resulted from or followed chronologically verse 5." Ross added:

If the writer had wished to show that this verse followed the preceding in sequence, he would have used the normal structure for narrative sequence (וַיִּימָן), 'and [then] he believed' -- as he did within the sentence to show that the reckoning followed the belief (וַיִּקְשְׁבָהּ),

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<sup>10</sup>T. V. Farris. *Mighty to Save: A Study in Old Testament Soteriology* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 76-77.

'and [so then] he reckoned it.' We must conclude that the narrator did not wish to show sequence between verses 5 and 6; rather, he wished to make a break with the narrative in order to supply this information about the faith of Abraham.<sup>11</sup>

But these analyses are certainly wrong, for both leave the context dangling in the air, not to mention the fact that Hebrew grammarians are not at all agreed about the meaning of the suffix or perfect conjugation in this type of construction. Like the NIV, they must omit translating the conjunction in verse 6 lest it appear that verses 1-5 are connected with verse 6. In doing, they create another problem in order allegedly to solve the first one.

Abraham obeyed God 25 years earlier when he left Ur of the Chaldees as God commanded him when he was 75 years old. But no-where in the intervening 25 years (Gen 17:17) was there ever any discussion of his faith or what it meant. Instead chapters 12, 13, and 14 of Genesis focused on the promise of the land. When Abraham turned 100 and Sarah had reached her 90th birthday, this servant of God offered to adopt his servant Eliezer, in order to help God bring about the promise of a seed he had offered some twenty-five years earlier. But God outrightly rejected that offer of self-help and instead predicted that in spite of Sarah's reaching menopause and Abraham's advanced age, a son would be born from their bodies. That son, as the story continued, would be in the direct line of the Messiah who was to come.

Now it is this promise that God had just made that became the object of his belief. He had further reinforced it by taking Abraham outside to view the stars and by adding the word that his own "seed" would reach proportions that were very similar to the number of stars (a hyperbole), although "seed" this time referred not to the representative of the total body, but now to the whole group. But in that the group had a key representative who was the promised One par excellence, then, the object of the OT believer's faith was no different from our own except for the fact that his name was not yet announced as Jesus. He was only known as the Seed of the woman and the Seed of the patriarchs

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<sup>11</sup>Allen P. Ross, "The Biblical Method of Salvation: A Case for Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*. ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, Il.: Crossway Books, 1988), 168.

and David. Later they would add the names of Messiah, Branch, Lamp of Israel, Stone, and other such titles in OT times.

*Salvation Provided by the Blood of a Substitute (Ex 12; Lev 16)*

Israel had been taught that the redemption of her firstborn sons was possible by the substitution of the blood of the lamb smeared on the lintels of the door of every Israelite household (Exod 12). Thus, annually in the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, there was provision made for "a sin offering to make atonement for the sins of the people" (Num 28:22). Year after year the ritual continued, but one day the real Lamb of God would come and the final sin offering would be offered, for what had only been a picture of what was to come was now to take on visible reality.

The Hebrew word "to make atonement" (כִּפֶּר) is one of the great terms for salvation in the OT. It did not mean "to cover"<sup>12</sup> the sins of the OT saints until the blood of Christ came, as is so frequently, but incorrectly, taught; rather, it meant to "ransom or to deliver by means of a substitute." Nowhere is this more clearly taught and illustrated in more graphic terms than in Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement. After the High Priest had stripped himself of the splendid robes of his high office, just as Christ Would similarly humble himself in the words

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<sup>12</sup>See R. Laird Harris, "כִּפֶּר," in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), I: 448-449. "It has been argued, more on the basis of כִּפֶּר "atone", which some translate "cover," that the OT sacrifices merely covered sin until it was dealt with *de facto* on the cross.... But it seems that we should say that the OT sin was indeed forgiven by God on the basis of the final sacrifice to come. The OT sacrifices were symbolic and typical but the forgiveness was real. At least, the other words נָקַט (take away), מָחָה (blot out), פָּקַח (forgive), etc. imply a real forgiveness so that sins were removed to an immeasurable distance (Ps 103:3, 11-12)." T. V. Farris decided that Gen 6:14, "to coat it with pitch" (emphasis ours) was the core idea of the כִּפֶּר root; כִּפֶּר did not offer a ransom or a deliverance on the basis of a substitute. Farris argued, instead, that כִּפֶּר was not a camouflage device of a concealment of our sins, but כִּפֶּר was a "covering" that acted as a symbol of death; thus, sin was not hidden, ignored, but neither was it forgotten in the OT!!

of Phil 2:6, he prepared to officiate on this most impressive of all days in the life of ancient Israel. Since the High Priest was not sinless, he had first to offer a sin offering for himself.

That completed, he then selected two goats to make up one sin offering. One goat was chosen by lot "to make atonement ... on behalf of the whole community of Israel" (Lev 16:17). The blood of this slain goat was taken into the Holy of Holies, it being entered only on this one day each year. There the blood was applied to the top of the mercy seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant, in order that the condition of God and man being at-one might be restored.

Next, the other goat once again had all the sins of all Israel (i.e., of all who were truly sorry in their own hearts and souls), confessed over it, and it was led away so that it would be forever lost in the wilderness. The point was this: sins were *forgiven* on the basis of a substitute; sins also were *forgotten*, as the goat symbolically carried all forgiven sins away and removed them as far as the east is from the west.

One must be careful not to infer that the blood of bulls and goats could remove sins, for nowhere in the OT does it claim that it did (cf also Heb 10:3). The Israelites experienced *subjective efficacy* for their sins (i.e., the sin and guilt were truly removed from being a block between God and humans) even though they had to wait for the *objective efficacy* until Christ's death for all sins (i.e., the receipt of the final payment for sin by the death of Christ on the cross). In that sense, then, the blood sacrifices only pictured what would one day happen as far as their objective efficacy was concerned; meanwhile complete subjective efficacy was enjoyed by all who availed themselves of God's provision.

The effectiveness of the sacrifices lay in the one who declared them righteous -- the God who would also pay the penalty when he sent his Son. That is why the sacrifices of OT individuals could be effective subjectively and personally even though the only adequate price that could make such forgiveness possible had not yet been paid.

*Salvation Resulting in Justification By Faith (Gen 15; Hab 2)*

Both Gen 15:6 and Hab 2:4 are the two key texts that teach justification by faith. In fact, some are now saying that so prominent is the theme of faith in the Pentateuch that it fairly represents the structure to the first five books. In some six to eight instances, faith or belief appear at what many regard as the "compositional seams" of the Pentateuch: Gen 15:6; Exod 4:5; Exod 14:31; Num 14:11; Num 20:12; and Deut 1:32 (with the possible addition of Gen 45:26 and Deut 9:32).<sup>13</sup> Thus faith was not a mere appendage added to an otherwise legalistic document: it was one of its central structuring themes.

So central was Hab 2:4 in the history of the Reformation that it became one of the main cries of that day. The Greek translators of the Septuagint modified the Hebrew text behind Hab 2:3 from "though in [meaning: the vision] linger, wait for it" into "If he tarry, wait for *him*." In fact, the Hebrew text may be read both ways. No doubt the writer of Hebrews, in 10:37, followed the Greek rendering when he affirmed that those who were righteous must wait for "the one who comes."

The principle that "the righteous will live by [their] faith" sets forth the doctrine of justification. In this text the "righteous" are the opposite of "the puffed up ones" in Hab 2:4. Those who are conceited and who rely on their own wits and resources to bale them out of difficulties do not need the grace of God, or so it would seem. Not so with the righteous: their only hope is in the God who had given his word of promise. No greater disparity could be imagined between two groups.

What, then, was "faith?" Is it the "faithfulness" of the righteous, as most commentators favor today? No, the Hebrew word אֱמוּנָה, is more accurately translated here as "faith," or "trust", especially since this text seems to be quoting and building on Gen 15:6 -- "And [Abraham] believed in the LORD and he credited it to him as righteousness. " Since there is no antecedent for the feminine "it," "it" must refer back

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<sup>13</sup>See Hanss-Christoph Schmitt, "Redaktion des Pentateuch im Geiste der Prophetie," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 (1982): 170-189 as cited by my colleague John H. Sailhamer, "The Mosaic Law and the Theology of the Pentateuch," *Westminster Theological Seminary* 53 (1991):241-161, though Sailhamer takes a different view as to what the meaning of the relationship of law and gospel is in the use of these belief terms.

to the verb, "he believed," and to the corresponding feminine noun for the verb, "to believe." That noun would be אֱמוּנָה, "belief." That is the precise noun that Habakkuk chose to use in Hab 2:4 to describe the justified person *vis à vis* the life of the arrogant, proud and puffed up person. Steadfast trust in God's promised Seed is the only way to receive God's gracious gift of life. In fact, faithfulness cannot even be conceived of apart from trust and reliance on the One who was to come and the God who sent him.

How would anyone to "righteous?" Righteousness in this context was not an ethical term, but a religious one. It had a forensic or legal aspect in that it was a judge's term, whereby he pronounced a person to be innocent of all charges against them. This usage can be seen in Exod 23:7, "God did justify the guilty," and in II Kgs 10:9, where Jehu exonerated the people of blood guilt of the sons of Ahab he had murdered by saying, "You are righteous," or better still, "You are innocent." Likewise in Job 40:8, it says, "Would you declare me wicked so that you can be declared righteous?" i.e., so that you might "justify yourself?" (cf. also Job 13:18; Isa 5:23). Thus, the righteous person is the one whom God has declared innocent, not the one who has worked for a certain ethical status or shown his faithfulness to a certain standard! When an OT person believed in the Man of Promise who was to come, God acted as the Judge and pronounced that person in the OT times "justified" and free of any further obligations as a result of the sin and guilt they had incurred.

#### *OT Salvation as Sanctification to a Life of Holiness (Lev 19)*

It is clear that the OT believer was not left to his or her own devices once they had put their faith in the person of promise who was coming through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David. On the contrary, the mark of godliness, righteousness, and purity were set by the character of God himself.

Repeatedly, the Law of Moses and the prophets kept calling God's people back to the one and only standard set by God. It was this: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2 *et passim*). Therefore, just as God was distinct and set apart to himself, so all who were called by his name likewise were set apart from all that did not fit

the mark or the goal of matching what he was in his person and character.

Not higher definition of holiness or sanctification could be given than the one that used the very character and nature of God as its mark. The mark of excellence, then, was the person of the living God; the law only served as a guide for promoting that type of holiness.<sup>14</sup>

*Salvation Anticipating the Resurrection From the Dead (Isa 26)*

The God of the OT was not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exod 6:3; cf. Luke 20:37-38). The prospect of life after death<sup>15</sup> ) is not as fully developed in the OT as it is in the NT, but there can be no doubt that the OT saints believed they would see God and enjoy his presence.<sup>16</sup> While this is an older article, many of the same presuppositions are still held today and therefore is valuable for comparative basis with a conservative position.)

As early as the days of Enoch in Gen 5:24, there was the confidence that this mortal body could go immediately into the immortal presence of the Living God. Enoch "was taken," to be with God without going through the painful process of dying. That ought to have settled the question as to whether men can live with God after death.

Interestingly enough, several ancient cultures, such as Egypt, in particular, focused the whole economy of the state on providing for one's afterlife. Thus, it is not as if this were a topic that one could not

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<sup>14</sup>See Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Law as God's Gracious Guidance for the Promotion of Holiness," in *The Law, the Gospel, and the Modern Christian: Five Views*, ed. Wayne G. Strickland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 177-225.

<sup>15</sup>George Mark Elliott, "Future Life in the Old Testament," *Seminary Review* 3 (1957): 41-94.

<sup>16</sup>S. Zandstra, "Sheol and Pit in the Old Testament," *Princeton Theological Review* 5 (1907): 631-641. Contrast this article with Lewis Bayles Patton on the future life in the OT in *The Biblical World* 35 (1910): 8-20; 80-92; 159-171; 246-258; 339-352.



conceive or even imaging in antiquity.

Abraham, too, was sure that God could raise his son back from the dead if he had to slay him as an offering to God (Gen 22:5). David also was certain of his own immortality in Ps 16. Abraham told his servants that he and his son would go, they would worship, and *they both* would come back again after worshipping! Likewise, David rested confident in the fact that God would raise up to the Lord's "Holy One," that is Christ. Hence he too would be raised from the grave (Ps 16:8-11; cf Acts 2:25-31).

Almost everyone concedes the fact that Dan 12:2 and Isa 26:19 promise life after death to the OT believer, but many consign these texts to late post-exilic times. However, the attempt to assign these texts to such a late date is determined more by what was thought possible for those times than it is by any objective criteria that are in the text itself. Rarely is any external verification offered. Thus Isaiah promises in his text that "your dead will live; their bodies will rise. You who dwell in the dust, wake up and shout for joy...; the earth will give birth to her dead."

Other texts could be cited here as well including Job 14:14; 19:25-27; Ps 49; PS 73:17; Ecc 2:14-16; 3:19-21; and 9:1-3.<sup>17</sup> These, and more, make a mighty case for the fact that there was a real hope of life beyond the grave for all who believed in the One who was to come.

### *Conclusion*

The offer of salvation in the OT carried in seminal form an organic connection with the continuation of the same doctrine in the NT. But most important of all, its object of hope was no less the same strong Son of God that we have also been taught to look to in the NT. Indeed, this was part of the "so great a salvation" that continued to be celebrated in the NT.

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<sup>17</sup>For further development of this theme, see the section entitled "What hope did OT believers have of life beyond the grave?" in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Rediscovering the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 141-144.

### ABSTRACT

This article probes into the object and content of personal belief with reference to the salvation in the Old Testament. Kaiser examines various topics such as Salvation by Means of Grace (Exod 34), Salvation Through the Regenerating Work of the Holy Spirit, Salvation Grounded in the Man of Promise (Gen 15), Salvation Provided by the Blood of a Substitute (Exod 12; Lev 16), Salvation Resulting in Justification by Faith (Gen 15; Hab 2), OT Salvation as Sanctification to a Life of Holiness (Lev 19), Salvation Anticipating the Resurrection from the Dead (Isa 26) and concludes that OT object of hope was no less the same strong Son of God that we have also been taught to look to in the NT. Kaiser argues that not only that many remote or "hidden peoples" in the world, who are "informationally B.C." but "chronologically" A.D., be saved by committing themselves to faith in God as Abraham and the rest of those who were chronologically B.C. did (Heb 11), they could also lay claim to eternal life with the Savior even though they could only point to the fact that there must be a God somewhere. The reason why these "informationally" uninformed peoples can be credited with this salvation is because that is what most contemporary Christians believe that the OT saints understood about being "saved" in the OT.

### 撮要

本文在舊約救恩觀念的前題下，探討個人信仰對象和內容的問題。凱瑟研究的課題包括：藉恩典而得的救恩（出三十四）、藉聖靈之重生工作而得的救恩、以應許中的那人為基礎的救恩（創十五）、由替代者的血所提供的救恩（出十二；利十六）、因信稱義而獲致的救恩（創十五；哈二）、以成聖的生活為舊約的救恩（利十九）、期望從死復活的救恩（賽二十六）。他斷定舊約中的盼望對象，跟新約教導我們所盼望之神的兒子是同樣的強烈。凱瑟主張，世上許多遙遠或「不為我們所知的人」，他們雖然「在資訊知識上是屬主前時代」，但「按年代是屬紀元後」的，這些人不單會如亞伯拉罕和其他按年代屬主前的人（來十一），因委身信神而蒙拯救，甚至他們只要能指出冥冥中必有一位神，也能為此而向救贖主取得永生。這些在資訊知識上屬主前時代的人能得此救恩的理由，是因大部份當代基督徒都相信，這是舊約聖徒所明白在舊約中蒙拯救的意義。