

SALVATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

HOW WERE PEOPLE SAVED IN OLD TESTAMENT TIMES?

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How were people in Old Testament times saved?

By faith.

We read that Abraham believed God (that's faith) and it was accounted unto him as righteousness (Genesis 15.6).

Abraham was still a sinner, but his faith was what was accepted by God and declared to be righteousness.

In Genesis 12, 1-3, God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation and that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. This constituted God's covenant and it was a solemn oath.

Centuries later, God gave the law to Moses but this law was in the context of the already-existing covenant God had made. The law was a reminder of the covenant.

In the Mosaic law, God established different sacrifices. There were two types of sacrifice namely those involving blood and those that did not.

One type was to enable fellowship and communion with God, known as propitiatory offerings and these offerings were the sin offering and the trespass offering.

The second type of offerings were made by believers in fellowship with God and such offerings would follow the propitiatory offerings. These fellowship offerings included the burnt offering, peace offering, thanksgiving offering, votive offering as in the performance of a vow, freewill offering and meal and drink offering

The propitiatory offerings were the sin offering and the trespass offering which meant the shedding of blood and the animals included would be cattle, sheep, goats, turtledoves and young pigeons. Pigeons were used by people who could not afford the more expensive animals (Leviticus 5. 7).

Other sacrifices were bloodless and might be vegetables, grain, from which bread may be made, olive oil, wine, salt and incense.

All animal and vegetable sacrifices had to be salted (Leviticus 2.13 etc.).

There are Christians who do not believe in freewill and so I wonder how they explain away the freewill offerings.

The sin offering was to obtain forgiveness for sin including sins of ignorance, sins that were unwittingly performed.

Even the priests had to make sin offerings for themselves (Leviticus 4.3).

While I object strongly to typology when it compares a human being with the Lord Jesus, the offerings do look forward to the Lord Jesus who is represented in the offerings including the sin offering. He atones for the guilt of sin (Hebrews 13 11-12). The Lord Jesus stood in the sinner's place. 1 Peter 2.24 says that the Lord Jesus was made sin for us.

The trespass offering was for a special offence whereas the sin offering symbolised general redemption as Alfred Edersheim writes. The trespass offering not only dealt with the sin but the damage it caused.

Christ atoned for sin and the damage it caused.

When it comes to the sin offering and the trespass offering, we should remember Hebrews 9.22 without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.

In Exodus 12, we have the first Passover when the Children of Israel put the blood of a lamb on the outsides of their doors so that the Angel of Death would pass over those houses and only kill the first-born of those not protected by the blood.

John the Baptist introduced the Lord Jesus as the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world.

The burnt offering reflected the inward decision of every true Hebrew. This was a freewill offering. They were performed every morning and night (Exodus 29.15) and every Sabbath with double offerings (Numbers 28. 9ff.), at the new moon, the Day of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement (Numbers 28. 11-29 etc.). Such offerings were also on special occasions such as the consecration of priests (Exodus 29.15), purification of women (Leviticus 12. 6 ff.), removal of ceremonial uncleanness (Leviticus 15.15 etc.) or a breach of the Nazarite vow (Numbers 6. 11ff.)

The Lord Jesus offered Himself willing. He said, "I have come to do Thy will, O my Father". That He was obedient to His Father means that His made the Father's will His own.

The Lord Jesus is our peace offering. The Christian has peace through the Blood of His cross, Ephesians 2.14 states, "He is our peace".

To return to the Passover, I have heard Christians say that the Lord Jesus is our Passover Lamb.

In Luke 22.20 He refers to the new testament (the new covenant) in His blood. The anonymous writer to the Hebrews refers to the new covenant (12. 29). It is a better covenant (8. 6). If the first covenant had been faultless there would be no need for the second (8.7). A new covenant made the first covenant old (8.13).

While this new covenant is for the Jews, it includes Gentiles. Ephesians 3. 6 states that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ of the Gospel. See also Acts 11.1, 13. 48, 15.7, 18.6, 28.28, Romans 15. 9 etc.

I have heard some Christians and denominations say that the people in the Old Testament were saved because they believed in the efficacy of the blood of Christ and, that although they were born on 'the wrong side of the Cross', that is to say before Christ came, makes no difference. Some say that the Church existed in the Old Testament and from the beginning of time. A Christian church without Christ?

Those who believe that Old Testament people were saved because they knew about Christ and the cross quote John 8.56 where the Lord says, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day and was glad".

But this refers to Genesis 14. 18ff when Abraham meet Melchizedek and they had a meal of bread and wine (communion) and Abraham gave Melchizedek tithes. He was a priest and the Lord Jesus is a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5. 6, 6.20), not the order of Aaron. This Melchizedek met Abraham and they had communion. He is an eternal being without descent, neither beginning of days, neither end of life, made like the Son of God and abideth a priest continually (Hebrews 7. 3). There can be no doubt who Melchizedek is.

Although this may be an unsatisfactory answer, it has been said that Old Testament believers knew that they would be saved but did not know exactly how, but put their faith in God.

That simple, uncomplicated faith is what we should strive for. We live after the Cross which gives us more reason to have a simple faith.

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