

Soteriological Items for Thought.

H. Graham Wilson, Jr.

I. The Nature of Progressive Revelation.

When analyzing the subject of **salvation** (*soteria*, deliverance, preservation) in the OT (LXX), one must recognize the concept of **progressive revelation**. “The recognition that God’s message to man was not given in one single act but was unfolded in a long series of successive acts and through the minds and hands of many men of varying background”¹. One needs to be careful not to read any of our more fully developed beliefs into the OT literature, for that would corrupt the inerrant text of Scripture. We must allow the Scripture to speak for itself, in order to have validity in interpretation².

“If textual meaning could change in any respect there could be no principle for distinguishing a valid interpretation from a false one”³.

What this means is that when viewing **salvation** in the OT one should not assume that God’s people (Israelites in covenant relationship with God) have always been fully aware of eternal judgment, the suffering of Jesus Christ, or the nature of justification by faith. The OT believers focus was on physical life and deliverance from death, and they had faith in the God whom they knew to be sovereign over all.

II. The Blessing of God: Life in the Land.

From an Israelite’s perspective, a natural death at the end of a long and fruitful life was not thought of as punishment, but as great reward⁴. The thought of a premature death was abhorrent to the righteous Israelite, who feared being cut off from his people and from the worship of His God⁵.

¹ Ryrie, Charles, Dispensationalism Today, p. 33.

² Ibid. pp. 122-131.

³ Hirsch, E.D. Jr., Validity of Interpretation, p. 6.

God's blessing came as a long and satisfying life in the Promised Land and His judgment was revealed in premature death in exile. Because of God's promise to Abraham (Gen. 12:3, 17:8) Israel would always retain the promise of the land. God also gave the Israelites an opportunity to choose between life and death, blessing and cursing on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant. This Mosaic Covenant was relevant only to the believing Israelite; the one eternally saved by grace through faith, and was their means of maintaining fellowship with God in order to enjoy physical life to its fullest. This is clearly stated in Deuteronomy 30:15-20:

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him. For the Lord is your life, and He will give you many years in the land He swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (KJV).

This passage has been called *the clearest expression of the Israelite view of life*. Israel would enjoy a prosperous physical life through obedience to the Mosaic Law, but death and exile would result from disobedience to the Mosaic Law. The conditional blessings of the Mosaic Covenant to the nation applied to individuals who were saved (Deut. 19-21). Each believing Israelite could expect a long and prosperous life in the land through the maintenance of right fellowship with God through obedience to the 613 commandments of the Mosaic Law.

⁴ Gen. 35:29; Ex. 20:12; Jud. 8:32; Ps. 21:4, 91:16.

⁵ Psalm 88

III. The Function of the Law.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the 613 commandments were to be the means by which God's people (believing Israelites) could express and show their allegiance to Him⁶. Because by obeying the Mosaic Law long life was expected⁷, the Mosaic law was regarded as a source of life⁸. The Mosaic Law was used to preserve national life and to keep Israel distinct in a hostile Gentile environment. This helped prepare the way for the promised Messiah, whose sacrifice would bring an end to the expectations of the entire Mosaic Law⁹.

IV. The Necessity of Grace.

Paul's statement in Ephesians 2:8 that "by grace you have been saved through faith" 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 that could be saved. But no one except Christ ever met such standards¹⁰. 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 life¹¹. If God dealt 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, different dispensations, but what is constant is that God's method of **salvation** is always a **grace** method, never a **work** method. There are several ways in which God's grace was

⁶ Deut. 30:20; Deut. 5:9-10.

⁷ Deut. 4:1; 5:33; 6:24; 8:1-3; 16:20.

⁸ Deut. 32:47.

⁹ Gal. 3:19-22; Matt. 5:17.

¹⁰ Psalm 14:3; Rom. 3:10-12.

¹¹ John 1:13; 3:5; 6:44; 8:34; Rom. 7:18, 24; 8:7-8; II Cor. 3:5; Eph. 2:1, 8-10; Heb. 11:6.

manifested in the OT. He elected Israel and made blessings available by grace.¹² He restored His sinning people by grace.¹³ He revealed Himself to the nation by grace¹⁴ and made the covenant by grace. Note the content of God's self-revelation in Exodus 34:6-7:

“The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness (Heb. *Hesed*) and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

The final statement about the consequences of sin being passed to successive generations has been used to make God appear to be overly cruel, particularly when compared to the revelation of the NT. However, Deuteronomy 7:9 demonstrates that the reference to “thousands” in this passage also refers to a number of generations. What God is saying is that He continues His covenant faithfulness for a thousand generations, but brings judgment for only three or four generations.

Truly the God of Israel is a God of **grace**.

V. The Necessity of Faith.

The idea that the Mosaic Law is the pathway of life may seem like only a short step from the error that one could earn eternal life through works. That idea, however, is clearly rejected in the OT¹⁵. God is always the One Who mercifully saves¹⁶, the sacrifices of the Mosaic Law expressed faith on the part of the believing worshiper who looked to God (not to the sacrifices) for forgiveness of committed sin to maintain fellowship¹⁷. The offerings themselves were never regarded as sufficient. As Hosea 6:6 reads: “For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

¹² Lev. 26:4-8; Deut. 7:14-16.

¹³ Jer. 31:20; Hos. 2:19.

¹⁴ Ps. 143:11; Jer. 14:21

¹⁵ Deut. 30:15-20.

¹⁶ Eph. 2:8-9.

¹⁷ Micah 6:6-8; Isa. 1:11-18.

Hebrews 11:2, 6 states it clearly, it was by faith that the “men of old gained approval”, for “without faith it is impossible to please Him.”

VI. Salvation Is Always By Grace Through Faith.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the OT did not teach a works salvation. There is no possible way that fallen creatures can accomplish their own eternal salvation¹⁸. Paul wrote, “I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly”¹⁹. If someone could be saved eternally by keeping the commandments of the Mosaic Law (all 613; cf. James 2:10), then there was no reason for Christ to die. OT believers were saved by grace through faith²⁰. It is important to realize that OT believers were saved on the basis of Christ’s death even though His crucifixion had not yet taken place²¹.

Romans 3:25-25 states “...whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.” This means that the forgiveness extended toward the OT believers was based not on the blood of the sacrificed animal, but on the blood of the soon to be sacrificed **Savior**²².

VII. The Purpose of the Mosaic Law.

The Mosaic Law had a **regulatory purpose**. It was given to make Israel a holy nation, distinct from Gentile nations in her fellowship with God and in her behavior²³. The Mosaic Law had a

¹⁸ Ps. 14:1-3; 53:1-3.

¹⁹ Gal. 2:21.

²⁰ Heb. 11:1-2.

²¹ Rom 3:23-26.

²² Heb. 10:4.

²³ Ex. 19:5-6; 31:16-17; Deut. 4:20; 7:6.

revelatory purpose, in that it revealed God's moral character and revealed sin to be sin²⁴. The Mosaic Law had a **dispensational purpose** in that it prepared the way for Christ to come in the fullness of time²⁵. In this way the sacrifices of the OT helped demonstrate the need for a Savior who could offer sacrifice once for all²⁶.

VIII. Dispensationalist View on Salvation.

1. The **author** or **source** of salvation is God (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).
2. The **object** of salvation (faith) is Jesus Christ (God; John 5:24, 17:3).
3. The **agent** of salvation is the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-10; Titus 3:5).
4. The **instrument** of salvation is the written or spoken word of God (Rom. 10:17).
5. The **basis** of salvation in every age is the death of Christ (John 3:16, Rom 3:23-26).
6. The biblical **requirement** in every age for salvation is faith (Eph. 2:8-10).
7. The **content** of faith changes in various dispensations (Gen. 15:6; 6:47; Acts 4:12).

²⁴ Lev. 11, 19, 20; Rom. 3:19-20.

²⁵ Gal. 3:24; Eph. 1:10.

²⁶ Heb. 10.