

Redemption in the Old Testament

Biblical Studies

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OVERVIEW

Although the holy Bible contains two distinct divisions, namely the Old Testament and the New Testament, there is only one Divine plan for redemption. Many pastors today preach the message of redemption only from the texts of the New Testament and the work of Christ on the cross. It is true that in the New Testament we have the latest, and final, essential revelation of God for the church age.¹ The cross is the central aspect of God's eternal purpose.² However, the condition for salvation is identical in both the Old and New Testaments in that the elect were, are, and will be saved only by grace through faith in the work of Jesus Christ.³ The story of redemption in the Old Testament is part of a larger whole in which God reveals His Divine plan for redemption in a long series of successive acts.⁴ Thus, the whole Old Testament points forward to the coming Messiah.⁵ To limit ones preaching on redemption to one single act of God is to deny the progressive revelatory-process and withhold the graciousness and love of God's towards His people. Just as Paul writes in the fifteenth chapter of Romans, "...whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction..."⁶ We must look at God's revelation to His people in the Old Testament as the interpreter of redemption.⁷ When we view the Scriptures in this

¹ Wells, Tom and Fred Zaspel, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*, (Frederick, Maryland: New Covenant Media), 2002, p. 7

² Reymond, Dr. Robert L, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc.), 1998, p. 465

³ Ibid, p. 528

⁴ Vos, Geerhardus, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.) , 1948, p. 5

⁵ Berkhof, Louis, *Systematic Theology*, (Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust), 2005, p. 293

⁶ *New American Standard Bible*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers), 1985, Rom 15:4

⁷ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 6

light, we can preach the message of redemption, the gospel message, in both the Old and New Testaments. For the Old Testament was established and confirmed by Christ's intercession and the message of the gospel declares nothing less than sinners are justified apart from their own merits by God's fatherly kindness.⁸

IN THE GARDEN

The work of redemption by Christ and its benefits were communicated to the elect in all ages successively from the beginning of the world in promises, types, and sacrifices⁹ and the first revelation is found in the protevangel.¹⁰ The first promise of salvation through the work of Christ shows how the grace of God has turned the curse upon the serpent into the promise for man.¹¹ In Genesis 3:15, this Old Testament revelation approaches the concept of a personal Messiah very gradually.¹² Only indirectly could the idea that the posterity of the woman be seen as a single individual in the future.¹³ Nonetheless, the promise is that somehow, out of the human race, a fatal blow will crush the head of the serpent.¹⁴ In this promise, God breaks the newly formed alliance by turning man's friendship with Satan into enmity and re-establishes man in friendship with

⁸ Calvin, John, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume I*, Ford Lewis Battles, trans., (London: Westminster John Knox Press), 1960, p.431

⁹ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications), 2001, VIII-6

¹⁰ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 293

¹¹ Sauer, Erich, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, transl. G. H. Lang, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1951, p. 59

¹² Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 44

¹³ Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 59

¹⁴ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 43

Himself.¹⁵ In addition, this relationship between God and man is not limited to individuals, but extends to their seed.¹⁶ Although, the object of their faith was much less definite than that of our own, none the less, the essence of their faith was the same – trust in God’s grace and power to bring deliverance from sin.¹⁷

ENOCH

When Adam sinned against God, he brought sin into the world, and death through sin.¹⁸ This fact is demonstrated in the fifth chapter of Genesis which lists the generations from Adam to Noah¹⁹. In each account, the patriarch is named along with the son’s name of the subsequent generation, their final age is given and then followed by the phrase “and then he died.” However, Enoch’s account is different. Enoch “walked with God.”²⁰ This means more than that he led a pious life or that he was a God-fearing and upright person.²¹ Enoch’s walking with God clearly mentioned is something special, which distinguishes Enoch from the others who were named.²² To “walk with God” points to a supernatural intercourse with God²³ and it implies that Enoch received special revelations from God.²⁴ Enoch was a recipient of God’s special grace in that the communion that had been broken by Adam during the Fall was restored with Enoch and once

¹⁵ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 293

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 294

¹⁷ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 44

¹⁸ Rom 5:12

¹⁹ Gen 5

²⁰ Gen 5:22

²¹ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 47

²² Vos, J. G., *Genesis*, (Pittsburgh: Crown & Covenant Publications), 2006, p. 117

²³ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 47

²⁴ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 117

this communion with God is restored, deliverance from death is bound to follow.²⁵ For Enoch, in the middle period of his life, suddenly, and in an unexplained manner, vanished from the sight of men, because God took him away.²⁶ Even though sin makes judgment necessary and death inevitable²⁷, we read that Enoch was removed from this world by the direct and supernatural act of God.²⁸ Although returning to Eden is not possible, God reveals through Enoch's walk with Him that death is not the absolute end of human existence.²⁹ This example of immortality was designed to elevate the minds of his saints with certain faith before their death and, thus, the translation of Enoch became a visible representation of a blessed resurrection.³⁰

NOAH

At the time of the flood, the human race came to moral ruin and was judged by God.³¹ Although the continuity of the work of God appeared to be in danger³², Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.³³ We must assume that the period of time represented before the flood must demonstrate the necessary outcome of sin when left to work itself out freely.³⁴ However, once again God's grace abounds and we read in the Biblical narrative that Noah "walked with God" and

²⁵ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 47

²⁶ Calvin, John, *Commentary on Genesis: Volume I*, (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 1996, p. 140

²⁷ House, Paul R., *Old Testament Theology*, (Illinois: InterVarsity Press), 1998, p. 147

²⁸ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 117

²⁹ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 479

³⁰ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 140

³¹ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 512

³² Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 48

³³ Gen 6:8

³⁴ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 48

was found blameless in his generation³⁵. As we have already seen with Enoch, this expression means something more than a pious man who lived a godly life.³⁶ This expression implies a supernatural communication with God.³⁷ And so, we find Noah spends a good part of his life in great weariness building an ark.³⁸ In building the ark, Noah and his family survive the deluge and escape death, but all flesh outside of Noah's family was destroyed by the flood and it is with Noah and his family that God established his covenant.³⁹ The continuity of the human race is preserved and God saves enough out of the wreck to enable Him to carry out His original purpose with the self-same humanity He had created.⁴⁰ The narrative of the deluge clearly identifies two different kinds of people in the world: those who perish eternally, and those with who God establishes His covenant.⁴¹ To be in covenant with God is the opposite of perishing eternally.⁴² Also, we should note that it is God alone that takes the initiative in establishing this covenantal relationship.⁴³ God promises that He will not again destroy all flesh by waters of a flood, and that the regular succession of seed time and harvest will continue.⁴⁴ It should be noted, however, that the promise is limited to the duration of history: "while the earth remains."⁴⁵ The catastrophe will not be repeated before the end of the world, and at that time the promise will no longer

³⁵ Gen 6:9

³⁶ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 125

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 125

³⁸ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume I*, p. 436

³⁹ Vos, *Genesis*, p.133

⁴⁰ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 48

⁴¹ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 133

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 133

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 161

⁴⁴ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 294

⁴⁵ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 156

hold good.⁴⁶ At that time, once again a wicked world will be destroyed by the righteous judgment of God.⁴⁷ This is the eschatological background that pertains to the deluge.⁴⁸ The New Testament places the epoch of Noah in parallel with the second coming of Christ.⁴⁹ This is especially notable in the writings of Peter, where the waters of baptism are compared to that of the waters of the flood⁵⁰. The water was an instrument of world judgment and separates the godly from the ungodly just as it does in baptism.⁵¹ Thus, even the flood that is sent on sinful mankind is a Divine act of salvation and demonstrates God right to destroy corrupt mankind for His honors sake.⁵²

ABRAM

God's choice of Abram initiates the ongoing practice of divine election.⁵³ Perhaps, God elects Noah, too, but the text hints that in Noah's era the Lord had no one else to choose.⁵⁴ However, the call of Abram has its goal in a redemptive people⁵⁵ and God chose Abram over all other believers of his time, such as Melchizedek.⁵⁶ Since all persons are infected with sin, God identifies an individual through whom the Lord's plan can be revealed and Abram's faith

⁴⁶ Vos, Geerhardus, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr., (Philipsburg, New Jersey: P & R Publishing), 2001, p. 82

⁴⁷ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 156

⁴⁸ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 52

⁴⁹ Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, p. 82

⁵⁰ 1 Peter 3:20

⁵¹ Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*, p. 82

⁵² Kohler, Ludwig, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. A. S. Todd, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), 1957, p. 219

⁵³ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 73

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 73

⁵⁵ Wells, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*, p. 52

⁵⁶ Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 90

replaces Eve's doubts concerning God's commands.⁵⁷ Up to the time of Abram there was no formal establishment of the covenant of grace.⁵⁸ Therefore, the covenant of grace underwent a remarkable advance in the election of Abram in that one family is taken out of the number of existing Shemitic families, and with it, the redemptive, revelatory work of God is carried forward.⁵⁹ The covenant formed with Abram, out of a gracious and merciful act of God, promises 1) land, 2) seed, and 3) blessing.⁶⁰ Here, God's original blessing for all mankind is restored and fulfilled through Abram and his offspring⁶¹ and, in addition, at the very start the final end is mentioned, "all people on the earth will be blessed through you."⁶² The spiritual blessings of the covenant of grace become far more apparent in the covenant with Abram than they were before.⁶³ Also, Abram finds that God's covenant was not confined to his generation, but extended to generations yet unborn.⁶⁴ This covenantal relationship between God and Abram is intensely personal and even changes Abram's status in the world.⁶⁵ The name Abram, which means "father exalted" was once sufficient to identify him in the world in which he lived, but now God changes his name to Abraham, which means "father of a multitude of nations."⁶⁶ As for Abraham, his final reward is put

⁵⁷ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 73

⁵⁸ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 295

⁵⁹ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 76

⁶⁰ Genesis 12:2-3

⁶¹ *The New International Version Study Bible*, ed. Kenneth Barker, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House), 1995, p. 24

⁶² Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 94

⁶³ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 295

⁶⁴ Baldwin, Joyce G., *The Message of Genesis 12-50*, (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press), 1986, p. 66

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 64

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 64

in the Lord alone for his promise of the land is a symbol of benevolence and a type of the heavenly inheritance to come.⁶⁷ Abraham also demonstrates the essence of being right with God which is his response by faith to his grace in accepting the covenant and the continued exhibition of this condition of mind in his life and conduct.⁶⁸

Years after the formalization of this faith-based covenant, Abraham faces the most significant “test” of his belief in God when God commands him to sacrifice his son Isaac, the son of the promise.⁶⁹ Without hesitating, Abraham takes his son to a place of offering and prepares to kill him.⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that when Abraham leaves the servants to go up the mountain for the sacrifice, he tells his servants to wait and we will worship and then we will come back to you.⁷¹ Already the testing has brought Abraham’s faith to full expression and he expected the Lord to uphold His promise and, by some means, bring the two of them back to their base.⁷² While on the mountain, we must also look at the role Isaac played. It is often said that Isaac played a passive role in the story, but he must have shared his father’s faith to the extent of cooperating with him.⁷³ The Jewish historian Josephus suggests that Isaac could have escaped from

⁶⁷ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume I*, p. 451

⁶⁸ Davidson, A. B., *The International Theological Library, The Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. by Charles Briggs and Stewart Salmond, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons), 1904, p. 279

⁶⁹ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 75

⁷⁰ Ibid, p.75

⁷¹ Genesis 22:5

⁷² Baldwin, *The Message of Genesis 12-50*, p. 90

⁷³ Ibid p. 91

Abraham if he had desired to.⁷⁴ The fact Isaac made no attempt to escape from Abraham indicates that he willingly offered himself to be bound and laid upon the altar by his father.⁷⁵ This reminds us of the truth that our Lord Jesus Christ willingly offered Himself to bear the sins of the world.⁷⁶ Abraham and Isaac both proved that they “feared” God, which is another way of saying that they base their lives on God and were willing to be obedient to all of the commands, even the most difficult ones.⁷⁷ Another important truth that is revealed in God’s plan of redemption is that the heart is the chief matter. Abraham had “sacrificed” Isaac to God and yet had not killed him.⁷⁸ The external completion of the act had been suddenly prevented by God, yet Abraham and Isaac were both willing to continue.⁷⁹ Thus, it is not only the external performance that makes a sacrifice a sacrifice, but the intention of the heart⁸⁰ and such is the same with sin.

MOSES

God’s Divine plan for redemption continues to unfold and become clearer to His chosen people in the redemptive story of the Passover and exodus from Egypt. Pharaoh would not let Moses and the Israelites go. The wrath of God would fall upon the Egyptians, both man and beast, as punishment for Pharaoh’s

⁷⁴ Vos, *Genesis*, p. 313

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 313

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 313

⁷⁷ Origen, *The Fathers of the Church: Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, transl. Ronald E. Heine, (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press), 1981, p. 143

⁷⁸ Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 100

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 100

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 100

conduct.⁸¹ However, God did not want to destroy all of the Egyptians and their cattle, so he sent the destroyer to kill the first-born males in Egypt.⁸² The deliverance of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt was at hand.⁸³ Moses told the Israelites to take a lamb free of blemish and slaughter them at twilight.⁸⁴ The characteristics of the lamb were significant in that it not only benefited the sacredness of the purpose to which they were devoted, but also was a symbol of the moral integrity of the person represented in the sacrifice.⁸⁵ The blood of the lamb was atoning blood for the Passover; a sacrifice which shadowed both expiation and quickening fellowship with God.⁸⁶ The blood was put on the sides and tops of the doorframes so that the Slayer passed over the houses of the Israelites that night.⁸⁷ The very word *pasach* is derived from this and means first, “to leap”, then “to jump over”, then “to spare”.⁸⁸ The smearing of the houses of the Israelites with atoning blood of the sacrifice set forth the reconciliation of Israel with its God, through forgiveness and expiation of sins, and through the sacrificial meal that followed, their communion with the Lord (i.e. their adoption as children of God).⁸⁹ We must keep in mind that it was not the blood of the animal which changed divine wrath into mercy and spared their firstborn, but the

⁸¹ Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume I*, transl. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1967, p. 500

⁸² Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume I*, p. 500

⁸³ Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume II*, transl. James Martin, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 1967, p. 9

⁸⁴ Exodus 12:1-13

⁸⁵ Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume II*, p. 11

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 13

⁸⁷ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 119

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, p. 119

⁸⁹ Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: Volume II*, p. 20

antitypical redemption that stood behind it.⁹⁰ The Paschal lamb presented a lively image of the Savior upon the “accursed tree”⁹¹ and the reality of the coming Lord’s death as a propitiation for the sins of man.⁹² Thus, the people of God were brought out of the bondage of slavery in Egypt. This great exodus of the people of God communicated God’s redemptive ways to His Old Testament people as He would do later for us.⁹³ Clearly the exodus demonstrates God’s love for and relationship with the patriarchs and their descendents.⁹⁴ The true bondage is the bondage of sin and to this day, this is the Egypt from which we must all be delivered.⁹⁵

We finally come to Sinai where the covenant between God and His people will become a truly national covenant.⁹⁶ Here, on Sinai, God announces that the relationship’s purpose is to establish a covenant with the entire nation.⁹⁷ Similarly to the deluge, God’s appearance on Sinai has an eschatological element.⁹⁸ However, in the deluge, the negative destruction-idea of the world’s crisis is brought out while here at Sinai, the constructive, positive element of redemption is presented...it is the climax of the events of the exodus.⁹⁹ Earlier God made a covenant with Noah and Abraham, now without subtracting anything

⁹⁰ Wells, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*, p. 60

⁹¹ Rawlinson, George, *The Pulpit Commentary: Exodus, Volume I*, ed. By Canon H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company), p. 264

⁹² *Ibid*, p. 265

⁹³ Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, p. 518

⁹⁴ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 105

⁹⁵ Rawlinson, *The Pulpit Commentary: Exodus, Volume I*, p. 265

⁹⁶ Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 298

⁹⁷ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 109

⁹⁸ Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*

⁹⁹ Vos, *The Eschatology of the Old Testament*

from the promises made to Abraham, the Lord endeavors to have a special friendship not just with one person or a single clan, but with an entire nation composed of Abraham's descendents.¹⁰⁰ On Sinai, the Decalogue is introduced and strikingly illustrates the redemptive structure of the theocracy as a whole.¹⁰¹ The Law was given to the people in covenant to become their rule of life.¹⁰² Their relationship with God must now take precedence over every other relationship.¹⁰³ The first commands cover Israel's relationship to God. The last commands indicate that the covenant will indeed have ramifications extending from the covenant people to the outside world.¹⁰⁴ This Law was necessary for many reasons. First, the moral knowledge possessed by man had gradually been parted with and what remained was distorted and confused.¹⁰⁵ Second, and most important, is that the chief meaning of the Law lies in the developing of an expectation of the redeemer by revealing human sinfulness, so that the Law acts as a "tutor" to bring us to Christ and to Him as the Savior of sinners.¹⁰⁶

CONCLUSION

Now we can see clearly that all men adopted by God into the company of His people since the beginning of the world were covenanted to Him by the same law

¹⁰⁰ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 109

¹⁰¹ Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, p. 129

¹⁰² Davidson, *The International Theological Library, The Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 280

¹⁰³ House, *Old Testament Theology*, p. 111

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, p. 111

¹⁰⁵ Rawlinson, *The Pulpit Commentary: Exodus, Volume II*, ed. By Canon H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Company), p. 140

¹⁰⁶ Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 121

and by the same bond of the same doctrine that obtains among us.¹⁰⁷ We see that the truth of the present was always singular and never multiple in sense.¹⁰⁸ Only today can we look backwards and, instructed through the interpretation of the later prophecies and fulfillments that God, in Genesis and Exodus, spoke of Christ His Son.¹⁰⁹ Thus the phrase “history of salvation” does not indicate a limited circle within universal history or fixate itself upon one event, but instead contemplates and interprets the whole history of mankind in its revelation to God.¹¹⁰ The New Testament is the apex of God’s revelation,¹¹¹ but in the Old Testament there is a forward flow that reaches its climax in the work of Christ on the cross.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume I*, p. 428

¹⁰⁸ Kaiser, *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New*, (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers), 1985, p. 72

¹⁰⁹ Sauer, *The Dawn of World Redemption: A Survey of Historical Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 94-95

¹¹⁰ Ibid p. 95

¹¹¹ Wells, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*, p. 7

¹¹² *Sources for Biblical and Theological Study: Volume 1, The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, ed. Ben C. Ollenburger, Elmer A. Martens, and Gerhard F. Hasel, (Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns), 1992, p. 382-383

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