

What Does the Bible Say About . . .?

November 27, 2006

Salvation Part I: Old Testament

- I. Introduction
 - A. Announcements
 - 1. Open with prayer
 - 2. Any new people? If so, summarize need to bring paper, pen, and Bible (various versions OK for comparison, but NRSV will be main one for reading, NASB for studying).
 - 3. Get list of names and how to contact (email preferred)
 - 4. 90 minutes on 4th Mondays at 7 p.m.
 - 5. Read passages (volunteers)
 - B. Does anyone have any questions/topics for us to consider for next time?
 - C. Since our last meeting, I have received several requested topics for discussion. The one I have chosen is a basic, foundational one. It may cover old ground for some, but perhaps we can find some new insights as we look at the context of the whole Bible and ask, “What is salvation and why is Jesus so important in it?”
 - 1. This is a very large and broad topic. There is no way we could cover this adequately short of a whole long series of meetings.
 - 2. So we are going to do a general survey to get the “big picture.” I’m sure it will leave many questions unanswered. Feel free to ask them, and we will deal with them now or at a future date.
 - 3. Even with the limitation of doing a more general discussion, it cannot be done in one session.
 - 4. So tonight we will lay the foundation as we consider Salvation Part I: The Old Testament and next time we will have Salvation Part II: The New Testament. Let’s begin.
- II. To understand salvation, the first thing we need to know is “Salvation from what? What are we being saved from?”
 - A. There are a lot of good answers to this question. **What are some we can think of off the tops of our heads?**
 - 1. (e.g., hell, death, unhappiness, purposelessness, wrath of God, sin)
 - 2. In some sense, all of these are more or less true.
 - 3. But let’s see what the Bible teaches as the most basic thing from which God offers to save us.
 - B. As always, to find God’s original intention, we need to look back to the beginning.
 - 1. Let’s read **Genesis 2:5-9**
 - a. There are 2 “plants” that are mentioned as being in the Garden of Eden.
 - b. They are rather unusual, and that should make us take note. There is something important about them.

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- c. **First off, what are the two “plants”?** (“Tree of Life” and “Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil”)
 - d. A lot of people can get distracted here and start debating about whether these were actual trees or metaphorical trees or just “mys-trees” (mysteries). We will not let ourselves get distracted by such “fruitless” debates. What’s important is the meaning of these trees, not what they were made of.
 2. Let’s read a bit more: **Genesis 2:15-17**
 3. **What does God say about each of the Trees and their availability to humankind?**
 - a. Tree of Life is available, so life was available. Apparently at that point we could have lived forever.
 - b. Tree of Knowledge of Good/Evil was available, but its fruit was not to be eaten.
- C. **What was the consequence God warned of if they ate from the forbidden tree?** (Death. Gen 2:17)
 1. Death. That was the horror that God wanted to save them from, and to save us all from.
 2. **What would cause this to happen? What was there about the forbidden tree that was such a danger?** (Sin)
 3. This is the very first mention of evil in the Bible. It is the first time the concept of sin is spoken of.
 4. Look at what God had said about everything else up until then.
 - a. **Genesis 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25**
 - b. And it is all summed up in **Genesis 1:31** (“God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good.” NRSV)
 5. Well, they ate it anyhow, didn’t they? (Gen 3:6)
 6. And, just as God had warned, they both dropped dead, right? No, they didn’t. And that brings us to our next question.
- D. What is the nature of the death we seek salvation from?
 1. **In Gen. 2:17, when did God say death would occur?**
 2. **And what kind of death does God talk about afterwards as the consequence?**
Read Gen 3:19.
 3. So we know that physical death is the result of human sin, but it didn’t happen on “the day that you eat of it.”
 - a. At least not if “day” is defined as 24 hours.
 - b. Some argue that death “in that day” means it’s a certainty in that day, even if not fully realized at once. Possible, but I think there is another better explanation.
 4. We know something did happen on that day, because Adam and Eve immediately saw themselves differently and their relationship with God changed. **Read Gen 3:8-9.**

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- a. They separated themselves from God. They hid away, and God had to come looking for them.
 - b. As a side-note here, let's not make the mistake some do of thinking this means God lost track of them. That's not the point of the narrative. The point is this: they were no longer in close contact with God. The relationship had changed.
 - 5. In these two simple verses are volumes of theology.
 - a. We are sinners and we know it and hide ourselves from God.
 - b. But God does not abandon us, and comes looking to find us. We can hear the echo here of Jesus' words to Zacchaeus: "For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost." (Luke 19:10)
 - E. Well, we are not told directly here what that change was for Adam and Eve (and therefore for us), but I think it's clear that there was another kind of immediate death that occurred.
 - 1. Remember that we were made in the image of God and God is spirit. So we are also beings, not just of physical body, but of spirit.
 - 2. Sin brought not just an eventual physical death, but an immediate spiritual death, too, for Adam, Eve, and all of their descendants.
 - 3. The New Testament proclaims it more clearly.
 - a. **Ephesians 2:1** (dead in sins and trespasses: not physical, but spiritual.)
 - b. **Col. 2:13** (dead and made alive: again this is spiritually, not physically.)
 - 4. What we need salvation from is death. Spiritual death came that terrible day in the Garden, and physical death surely follows. Both of these horrors are the consequence of our separation from God by human sin.
- III. So now what? How can we be saved from death? What are the options God has? Why would God limit the ways we could be saved?
- A. Let's just brainstorm for a minute and put down some possible options for salvation we can think of. (Write on board—get volunteer)
 - 1. God could start over.
 - a. **What would prevent the same thing from happening again?**
 - b. There's a kind of joke definition of insanity: "Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result."
 - c. What kind of god would do that? Certainly not God our creator. Starting over is not really a viable option.
 - 2. God could make it impossible for people to sin.
 - a. **What kind of creatures would we be if no free will to choose, if we could only "choose" what God had programmed into us?**
 - b. The popular talking Elmo dolls can move and laugh and talk, but they can only do what we tell them to do. Little kids love them, but older kids and adults quickly lose interest. Why?

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3. God could have looked for a kind of middle ground by preventing satan from tempting Adam and Eve.
 - a. The introduction to the book of Job gives us something to think about here. See **Job 1:6-12**. This is a description of God setting the limits. It is clear that God is in charge, **so why would God allow the devil (or any other being) to have access to human beings?**
 - b. To put it another way, **if there were no tempter, what kind of charge do you think satan could levy against God?** (Just like in case of Job, “Does Job fear God for nothing?” [v. 9])
 - c. If there had been no one to tempt them, the charge could justifiably be made that “of course they chose God, they didn’t know anything else. The game was rigged.”
 - d. It would be an indictment against God’s fairness and a challenge to the honor of God and to the value of human loyalty. This option fails, too.
 4. God could freely forgive all sin without any consequences to anyone.
 - a. **What then would happen to justice?**
 - b. This would mean that no sin would be punished, and all sin would be allowed.
 - c. What kind of world would this be if all sin were allowed without fear of any negative consequences? This would hardly be the world of a loving or a holy God. This option is impossible too.
 5. God could let us live on despite our sin.
 - a. This is one of the scariest options of all. Think of what that would mean.
 - b. The evil in the world now would continue forever, probably continuing to worsen. This sounds more like hell than heaven to me.
 - c. And worse than that, our separation from God would also continue forever. Not a good option.
 6. **(Other possibility?)**
 7. Let’s see what God decided.
- B. We find two important clues right after the sin of Adam and Eve.
1. **Gen. 3:21** (God clothed Adam/Eve with skins.)
 - a. Notice the use of the skins of dead animals. This is the first evidence of any physical death and the first indication of the need of death/sacrifice to “cover” sin/shame.
 - b. In most societies before our modern Western one, at least, nakedness (however it was defined) was shameful. Adam and Eve’s nakedness and shame and sin are all part of the same picture.
 - c. To be naked is to be shamed, and sin is a cause of shame. So in the Biblical writing, nakedness reminds us of shame, which reminds us of sin.

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- d. Covering the nakedness, then, is a picture of covering sin and removing its shame. It is, in fact, a picture that gives us our first definition of salvation: **God covers the shame of our sin through the sacrifice of another.**
2. Who that other would be was hinted at in **Gen 3:15**. This promise God made that the seed / “offspring” of the woman would crush the serpent’s head foreshadows the victory over satan and sin and, therefore, over death, by a human being.
 - a. Notice that it is the descendant of the *woman* rather than the man.
 - b. This is astounding. It goes against every cultural norm and expectation.
 - c. Descendants were traced through the male line. But God was preparing us for the virgin Mary.
- C. When we read the Bible, it’s important to keep in mind where we are in the history of God’s revelation.
 1. God did not reveal everything all at once.
 2. What we have in the Bible is what is often called “progressive revelation.”
 3. In other words, things become more specific and more clear over time.
 4. This is not only true regarding what God says, but also in what God does.
- D. As we progress through the Old Testament we find God, in words and actions, showing the different things that we might *think* would save us, but in fact cannot.
 1. It might seem to be a long and roundabout way of doing things, but it is completely necessary both to teach us and to make it clear that the salvation God actually offers is the only salvation that is possible.
 2. In fact each of the false notions of salvation that God presents and discredits are still believed and promoted by many people today. Such belief is dangerous deceptive, and leads to tragic consequences.
- E. The first false notion of salvation is that God could simply start over with a new and faithful/righteous family. We have already talked about this somewhat philosophically, but God actually demonstrated in human history that this would not work.
 1. We find just such a family in **Genesis 6:9-22** (Noah righteous in eyes of God. Note v. 22)
 2. What was the rest of the world like? (v. 11-12) It seemed like the time had come to start over.
 3. The events of Noah’s family and the Flood are often thought of as being a sort of picture of salvation.
 - a. The faithful family was saved, while the rebellious, unrepentent sinners were destroyed.
 - b. It is a partial picture of salvation, but a closer look shows us its historical failure, too.

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4. The first thing that happens after the Flood recedes, we find in **Gen. 8:20-22** (Noah made sacrifice to God.) Everything is looking pretty good for a fresh start, isn't it? There's hope that the curse of sin and death might be ended.
5. Not so fast. Read **Gen 9:18-29**
 - a. Far too many theologians and others get bogged down here speculating about what exactly was Ham's sin. By doing so they miss the real point.
 - b. The parallel with Adam and Eve is so strong it's hard to see how it could be missed.
 - c. For the context to help us we need to look also at **Genesis 9:1**. God gave Noah the same instructions Adam/Eve were given. And in the passage we just read, we once again have the "unholy trio" of nakedness, shame, and sin. Just like Adam and Eve.
 - d. Here is the point: Even after all the faithless and violent families of the earth were washed away, the curse of sin and death remained.
 - e. Just to make sure we get the point, v. **29** tells us what happens to Noah (he died.). This time there isn't even a mention of satan/the serpent being involved. It's all on us. Even the righteous are not righteous enough.
6. **So, what about salvation? Can a righteous family save us?**
 - a. (No. Even when every sinful person on earth was destroyed, sin still remained even in the people most completely faithful to God.)
 - b. Yet this is what is taught by Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.
 - c. And this is much like what is believed by many people who think they can be good enough to get into God's heaven.
7. **What about the sacrifices? Did they eliminate sin and death?** (Clearly not. But there are many people who believe they can be saved by giving to God or doing something wonderful for God. History says otherwise.)
8. But the Bible does give us another hint about the ultimate answer to salvation. **Genesis 9:26-27**
 - a. In Noah's blessing of his children, who is singled out for the greatest blessing? (Shem.)
 - b. From Shem we get the Shemites, or as it is pronounced later, Semites.
 - c. This is progressive revelation. God had now revealed which people will give rise to the Savior.
 - d. In Genesis 11:10-26 we are given the list of generations descended from Shem. It culminates with Abram/Abraham, the Semitic founder of Israel and the Jews.
 - e. **John 4:19-22** Notice what Jesus said about salvation (Salvation is from the Jews.). Jesus didn't just make it up when he pointed this out to the Samaritan woman at the well. He was reminding her (and us) of what had long been God's plan for salvation, revealed since the time of Noah.

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- f. But as we have seen, salvation was decidedly not accomplished by Noah and his family.
- F. If humanity cannot be saved by a righteous family and a new beginning, can it be saved by a whole nation founded by God?
 - 1. This is what many Jewish theologians argue today: that Israel itself is in some sense the savior.
 - a. But in order to be that savior, it would have to fulfill its promises and covenants with God.
 - b. So let's take a brief look at the next phase of God's progressive revelation. Can humanity be saved by a nation devoted to God?
 - 2. It begins with a covenant between God and Shem's descendant Abram in **Genesis 12:1-4**.
 - 3. In the lives of Abraham, his son Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob, we see the beginnings of a nation, a new people, who are to become a theocracy. They are to be a people with God as their King and faithfulness to God as their law.
 - 4. They are to be a blessing to "all the families of the earth," to bring them salvation. **But did they do it?**
 - a. For many generations they lived in Canaan. **Did they establish faith in God among the Canaanites?** (No. In fact Jacob's family embraced the Canaanite idolatry: **Genesis 31:19**. And Jacob earned a reputation as a liar and a cheat.)
 - b. Then for hundreds of years in the time of Joseph they lived in Egypt (Exodus 1). **Did they establish faith in God among the Egyptians?** (No. See Exodus 7 and following for confrontation with Egypt's religion/gods).
 - c. Abraham's roots were in Chaldea, also known as Babylon. **Did they establish faith in God among the Chaldeans?** (No. No evidence of anything but conflict between them and Israel.)
 - d. The beginning with Abraham and the new people called Israel had been promising, but as with Adam and Noah beforehand, it soon degenerated.
- G. But maybe this idea of a holy nation can be saved by giving them a clear set of rules . . . a list of do's and don'ts to guide them and keep them on the faithful path.
 - 1. God made a personal covenant with Adam, another with Noah, then with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to found the nation. None of them accomplished salvation.
 - 2. So through Moses, God made a covenant with the whole nation of Israel, a handbook on holiness.
 - 3. Deut. 5:1-21. The 10 commandments were given to ALL the people as a covenant, not to just a few individuals, but to everybody—the whole nation.
 - a. But the whole rest of the Old Testament shows their failure.
 - b. Time and again they abandon God for idolatry.

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- c. The prophets condemn their false worship, their mistreatment of the poor, and their arrogance for believing their genealogy gives them special status with God.
- IV. We have seen that we can't be saved by being part of certain group (faithful family or faithful nation), nor by following a set of commands (covenant of Law), so how?
- A. Going even a step further, God gave them a religious leader—Moses—to intercede for the people with God.
 - 1. Dt. 5:22-33 (Moses intercedes for people with God after receive 10 commandments. Speaks with God on people's behalf. They are afraid to do so.)
 - 2. But as we saw in our previous study in Numbers, even Moses failed (Numbers 20:1-12). He was not allowed to lead them into the Promised Land. He was not the savior.
 - B. Perhaps having a religious leader wasn't enough. Maybe the people needed to be held in line by a righteous king who could *enforce* the laws of God.
 - 1. So God let the people have a king, but their first one—King Saul—was a disaster.
 - 2. God then anointed a new one: King David, who was “a man after God's own heart.” (1st Samuel 13:14)
 - 3. God made a special covenant with David that would last forever.
 - 4. It happened when David had decided to build a “house” for God, a temple. God replied to David through the prophet Nathan telling him that David wouldn't build God a house; it was God who would build a house for David. **2nd Samuel 7:12-17**¹
 - a. David's son Solomon did build a temple, but it did not last forever.
 - b. David sinned and failed more than once and Solomon even more so.
 - c. In fact every king that followed fell short, some spectacularly so.
 - 5. But God had narrowed the focus. Now we know that God's salvation will come from a descendant of David, no matter how bad it looks at the moment.
 - 6. But we also have been shown that even a king who was “a man after God's own heart” could not keep his nation, his own family, or even himself always true to God.

¹ Verse 14 says of the descendant/son “when he commits iniquity” he will be punished. This is confusing if this indeed is a prophecy about Jesus Christ. Briefly, there are two explanations for this. Adam Clarke points to the Hebrew word for “commit iniquity” and shows that in the form used here it may mean “to suffer iniquity.” By extension it can then be taken as meaning to suffer punishment. While that is possible, I think it is still weak. A stronger explanation is found in realizing the double fulfillment so common in prophecy. There is a partial sense of fulfillment at once and a fuller one in a time to come. The iniquity in mind would have been that of Solomon, David's immediate son, not the ultimate Son Jesus who would reign on David's throne forever. Perhaps the ambiguity of the translation Clarke points out is deliberate, because after all, God had not yet revealed everything.

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7. The promise of salvation still remained to be fulfilled.
- C. There are a lot of theories about salvation held by different religions and by people in general.
1. In the Bible, through God's progressive revelation those theories are put to the test and found wanting.
 - a. We have seen that salvation of everyone without regard to sin would lead to disaster and would treat God as a hypocrite who tells us not to sin, but in the end doesn't seem to care if we do.
 - b. And salvation "by our own bootstraps" has been shown to be an illusion. No individual, family, or nation has been able to do it—no matter how apparently righteous nor how closely led by God, by incredible religious leaders, or even by a truly God-centered king.
 2. Every religious system based on human obedience fails to deliver any hope for salvation. Sacrifices and rituals haven't done it either.
 3. Some are fond of saying that "All roads lead to God." But we have seen that is not true. All the roads that depend in any way on mere human beings have turned out to be dead ends. Literally.
- D. There really is only one possible hope left, and the Old Testament has proclaimed it all along.
1. Despite the consistent record of human failure, the one who will win salvation for humanity must be, and is, one of us.
 - a. We have followed the trail: a descendant of Adam, of Seth, of Abraham, and of David. But it can't be an ordinary person. It must be someone specifically appointed by God.
 - b. There are many passages that tell us this, but perhaps the most well known and powerful is **Isaiah 52:13-53:5, 11-12**
 2. Our salvation will come only through a human being, but at the same time we are told that the only one who can win our salvation is God.
 - a. **Hosea 13:4** (Besides me there is no savior, says God.) *By the way, this and the following quotations strongly refute Jehovah's Witnesses' attempt to say Jesus was our savior, but that he was not God.*
 - b. **Isaiah 43:8-11** (I am savior and there is no other, says God.)
 - c. **Isaiah 45:20-23** (There is no other. Every knee shall bow.)
 3. That last quote should remind us of what the New Testament says about Jesus (Philippians 2:9-11) That is no accident.
 - a. Jesus is the only one who fulfills what the whole of the Old Testament has said about our salvation and our savior: He is one of us, yet fully God.
 - b. But more on that next time, and more on the question of salvation for those who do not know Jesus or do not put their faith in him.

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- V. Summary
 - A. Our goals today were to learn at least some of what the Bible teaches us about salvation.
 - 1. Have we done that satisfactorily?
 - 2. Are there still questions on this topic we need to discuss more?
 - B. What questions for next time?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - C. Next meeting: Monday, January 22, 2007. 7:00 p.m.
 - D. Closing prayer
 - E. **Archives of class notes can be found online at: www.fumcwa.org/classes/wdbsa**