***The Age of the Kingdom, No. 8  
  
DS13A***

As we continue with our study of the dispensations, this is segment number 25. This doctrine is very important because it is the key to enable us to apply the Scriptures properly. The different parts of the Bible do not apply to all people in all dispensations. This doctrine enables us to take the parts of the Scripture that belong to a certain era of time, and to apply them, and thereby to function according to what God designed for that particular time. In other words, this is what the Bible refers to as rightly dividing the Word of truth.

The doctrine of the dispensations is widely discredited today, particularly among that group of theologians that we have referred to as Covenant Theology. These people are amillennial. They do not believe that there is any future kingdom of Christ here on this earth in a physical sense that the Lord will be ruling over. Now one of the attacks, in order to try to discredit dispensationalism, is a very major one. In fact, it's probably the one that the amillennialist will inevitably use against you, and that is that, "You teach more than one way of salvation. You dispensationalists believe that in one dispensation people got to heaven one way, and in another dispensation God had another plan." That's the issue that we want to take up in some detail here because if this is true about us, we're in deep trouble. This would be a very very serious accusation if it could be sustained. I assure you it is not true. So let's look at the subject of salvation in dispensationalism.

**Grace**

The claim is made that because we separate Israel and the church into two different entities, and because we say that law and grace are not related, then that makes it impossible for people in the Old Testament to be saved on the same basis as people in the New Testament. In other words, the amillennialist says that if you say that the Old Testament was law and the Christian era is grace, then people could not be saved by grace in the Old Testament the way they are in the New Testament. Do you get the argument? Because we see law and grace are separate, as the Scriptures indicate they are, the amillennialist says that it is then obvious that nobody could be saved by grace in the Old Testament because you're saying that grace only exists in this age of the church.

The labeling of the church age as the era of grace is misunderstood by the amillennialist. That's the first answer to that argument. When we say that God is dealing with us primarily on the principle of grace in this age (which He is), we are not at the same time saying that there was no grace in previous dispensations. That's what the amillennialist tries to say that we're doing, but we are not saying that. We believe that grace existed and was evident in every dispensation, but the grace of God was not the dominant feature as a way of life as it is today. As a matter of fact, even today when we are living in the age of grace, those of you who have followed the studies in the book of Philippians are aware of the fact that James 4:6 speaks of the fact that during the dispensation of grace, God gives certain Christians super grace above that which he normally gives all the believers. So even within this dispensation of grace, some Christians, because they have built and put on a breastplate of righteousness, are in a position where they receive more grace than that which the ordinary believer (who has not moved up to spiritual maturity) will receive.

So grace varies from age to age. This is not to say that it does not exist in other dispensations. It just varies. The accusation that we teach different ways of salvation other than by grace through faith is not true. An amillennialist (or a Covenant Theologian) can say, "You people teach more than one way of salvation because you want to exclude grace from the Old Testament." You can say, "No, that's not true. You've misunderstood us. We believe the grace of God was operating in the Old Testament. It was not the major factor of God's dealing, but when it came to salvation, it was on the basis of grace through faith." Don't think that if you tell him that, that he will say, "Oh, now I understand," and that you will have cleared up anything. The amillennialists have a way of ignoring our denials on this point. Part of it is because they are hard-pressed to discredit dispensationalism.

So the amillennialists claim that a single way of salvation is a new emphasis by dispensationalists. They say, "Oh, yeah you're just saying that now because we've pointed this out to you, and so now you're hastening to reassure us that you only believe in salvation in one way. But that doesn't evolve out of your teaching. That can't be substantiated out of what you say about separation of law and grace and about separation of the church and Israel. You can't maintain that separation and still claim only one way of salvation. You're only saying this now. It's a new emphasis."

Well, the amillennials are saying that it's illogical to say that Israel and the church are two different entities--that law is one way of life, and grace is another, and the two are not to be mixed. They say it is illogical to say that and then to claim that everybody can be saved on the same basis in all dispensations.

One of the ways they seek to defend this is by jumping on statements of leading dispensationalists--statements which were not clearly phrased. When they were written, these dispensationalists at the time were not trying to avoid a certain conflict or a certain misunderstanding. In the old Scofield bible, you will find a statement made by Dr. Scofield relative to the explanation of the doctrine of the dispensation which indeed does sound like he is saying that in the Old Testament a person was saved by his law works, as over in the New Testament he is saved by his grace faith. However, Dr. Scofield from other teachings, and others of his era, did not in the least believe in two ways of salvation. What he was saying in that note in the Old Scofield Bible was not to be interpreted as more than one way of salvation. His emphasis (his line of thought) was along a different line. In the new edition of the Scofield Bible, that misunderstanding has been corrected.

What the amillennialists do in this kind of an attack is something that they themselves are often guilty of. You can read the writings of amillennialists, and sometimes they talk about salvation in the Old Testament as if it were different from that in the New Testament. For example, one of the outstanding amillennial non-dispensationalists is Louis Berkhof. In his Systematic Theology, page 614, he says, "From the law, both as a means of obtaining eternal life, and as a condemning power, believers are set free in Christ." You couldn't say anything that sounded more like salvation through the law. Now we know that Dr. Berkhof knows better than that. He knows very well that the Bible says you cannot be saved through the law, and it would be unfair of us to take this statement and say, "You see he's teaching more than one way of salvation." This is a problem of words, in the way he has expressed himself. Much that the amillennialists make about what leading dispensationalists of the past have said is also to be attributed simply to the way they were expressing themselves.

So let's take a look at the view of salvation from the dispensational frame of reference. What do we really say concerning salvation? Well, when we want to think of dispensationalists, no greater one can come to our mind than Lewis Sperry Chafer, the founder of Dallas Seminary. Here is his statement concerning the view of dispensationalists on the subject of salvation through the different ages of human history: "Are there two ways by which one may be saved? In reply to this question, it may be stated that salvation of whatever specific character is always the work of God in behalf of man, and never a work of man in behalf of God. This is to assert that God never saved any one person or group of persons on any other ground than that righteous freedom to do so which the cross of Christ secured. There is, therefore, but one way to be saved, and that is by the power of God made possible through the sacrifice of Christ." So Dr. Chafer, as a leading dispensationalist very clearly declared one way of salvation.

The dispensationalist recognizes that the grace of God was operating during the Mosaic Law era, and that salvation in the old dispensations was by grace through faith just as it is today. There is a relationship between law and grace during the various dispensations that we have to look into. I think that if we understand this, it will clear up some of this confusion. God dealt in grace, for example, with Adam and Eve. You remember that after they sinned, they hid from God. The first thing God did was a very gracious act of going into the garden and calling Adam by name, and He approached the fallen man. God took the trouble in grace to approach man and to bring man to Himself to deal with the sin problem. He, of course, also provided them with the animal skins symbolic of the salvation which Christ was to provide as the covering. Furthermore, He also gave them the promise of one who would be born through the woman who would destroy the power which Satan had now established over them. What happened in the very first dispensation was clearly an act of the grace of God.

As the dispensations move along, the operation of the grace of God is seen in mounting effect. God's grace does not become less through the dispensations. You would be mistaken to think that. As a matter of fact, from the very first, God's grace comes more and more. During the period of the Mosaic Law, this is also true. Here's where people have the idea that grace begins to retire--that you have less grace during the period of the Mosaic Law era than you did before.

However, just think for a minute of the history of the Jewish people. They traveled from slavery in Egypt to Kadeshbarnea during that year that they were moving along in the wilderness. They repeatedly operated on their human viewpoint. Numbers 14:22 tells us the ten times that God tested their faith, and ten times they responded with negative viewpoint: the Red Sea; the bitter waters of Marah; the lack of water at Rephidim; the need for food; the absence of Moses on Sinai; the challenge to the authority of Moses; complaining about the Lord's care of them; and, finally the ultimate act--the refusal to enter the land at Kadeshbarnea because they took the negative viewpoint report of the ten spies.

Yet, as we saw again and again, God graciously listened to this complaining crew. He listened to this people who were attacking their spiritual leaders and who were striking at the authority that God had placed over them, and in grace God would come through and he would meet their need. When they faced the water of the Red Sea, He brought them through. When the waters were bitter at Marah, He made them palatable for their drinking. When they needed water, He had Moses strike the rock, and He provided the water. When they needed food, He gave them (in spite of their complaining) the manna and the quail, and so on. Right down the line, God provided.

God did come to the point where He said, "I can take no more of this. I will no longer even move among this people. I'm going to send an angel to move through you, but I will no longer be in your midst." However, even this was an act of the grace of God. For God said, "I am doing this because (otherwise), in my wrath, I'll kill the whole nation now." Finally, they came to the point where God's ultimate grace was really shown in the fact that He could have destroyed them all in Kadeshbarnea, but instead he said, "Your discipline will be that you will live out your lives over the next 40 years, and those of you 19 years old and younger, you will survive, and you will go into the land. Obviously, God regularly dealt in grace with these ingrates--these complainers, and He provided for them grace galore in the face of fantastic apostasy.

So when it came time for Moses to go up on the mount of Sinai, it was quite evident that this too was an act of the grace of God. If there was anything these people needed, they had to have spelled out for them what God expected of them. If there was anything that would have been of value to them, it was the 613 statements of regulations that gave divine viewpoint and specific statements of truth that they could follow. This was a gracious thing for God to give them the law system. They were so blind to what was going on, that this was a gracious thing. So God did this. This was a sign of grace in that era.

So the law came along, and its gracious quality was immediately evident by the fact that it made Israel famous among the nations. Deuteronomy 4:6-8 and Deuteronomy 33:1-4 tell us of the fame that came to them. This was a grace that they did not deserve. The grace promises of the Abrahamic Covenant were not annulled because of the law system. Galatians 3:17-19 make it clear that the law was simply brought in alongside of the grace promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. You remember that God made it very clear to Abraham that He was giving him promises relative to a nation that was to come, and to a ruler and to a country that they would own. All of these things were going to be done by God alone.

The subsequent covenants that flowed from this, the Palestinian, the Davidic, and the New covenants, these too based upon the Abrahamic covenant, were unconditional. There was nothing that man had to do to secure this. Now that was a fantastic grace, and nothing affected that condition of grace of those covenants. No matter what the Jews did over the centuries, it didn't change those promises that God made to Abraham. The law rules made sin stand out very clearly. In that very fact, that was an act of grace. When they compared themselves in their performance to these 613 rules, they saw what a gross people they were. It showed them the fact that they really needed a savior.

There is a contrast in the Word of God made very clear between law works and grace faith. This is what the amillennialist often ignores. The Bible does distinguish between the law works of the Old Testament and the grace qualities which were there. Law was there, but this does not mean--and that's my point here--that grace did not exist in the operating of God in the Old Testament.

For example, John 1:17 says, "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." It is evident that law and grace faith are being contrasted there. You can't deny that. Take a look at Romans 6:14: "For sin does not have dominion over you, for you are not under the law, but under grace." There again is a very clear and definite contrast made in the Bible between law and grace. The amillennialist is putting himself in a very difficult position when he tries to take the attitude that these are not separate. Every now and then, I am amazed, and I never get over being surprised. Every now and then, I hear a preacher who gets up and says, "There is no difference between law and grace." We can see by these Scriptures that the Bible says that there is a difference. Galatians 3:23 does the same thing when Paul says, "But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed."

So the law was there. Grace existed in the Old Testament. When the law came in, grace was there from the very first. When the law came in, it came alongside the grace: the grace that God had exercised toward Adam and Eve; the grace that God had exercised toward Abraham in the covenant He made with him; and, so on. Grace was there. Law came in alongside. It did not eliminate grace in the Old Testament.

There is evidence of grace being present in God's operating even under the law system. This was displayed in the fact that God elected Israel as a special nation with numerous blessings upon them. Leviticus 26:4-8 and Deuteronomy 7:14-16 tell us that God's grace was exercised toward the Jewish people in selecting them as His special nation. They didn't deserve this. God said that there was nothing better about Israel than the other nations. However, He selected them out of His grace, and that's why He loved them. Grace under the law is also displayed in God's frequent restoration of His sinning people. Again and again they sinned, just as we have seen in that year coming out of Egypt. Yet again and again, God restored them (Jeremiah 31:20, Hosea 2:19). God's grace was overriding their negative volition.

Grace is also displayed under the law in the giving of the New Covenant which promised a full spiritual restoration. This was given at a time when the law was in shreds among the people. When God gave the New Covenant, Israel was at a fantastically low point in its spiritual relationship with God. It had made a debauchery of the law system. Yet, God gives them a New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-32 in which He says, "I'm going to do something for you, but it won't be like the Mosaic Covenant which depended upon you. It will be a New Covenant, and it'll only depend upon Me."

Grace was also displayed in the law era by the enablement which God gave for specific tasks through the Holy Spirit. You have many passages of Scripture that tell how God enabled people to do things. He gave them Holy Spirit power under the law system. For example, you have this in Daniel 4:8, 1 Peter 1:11 (which looks back to that in the Old Testament), Judges 3:10, 1 Samuel 10:9-10, and Exodus 28:3.

This, of course, is of great contrast with what exists today. Today, every one of us as believers is indwelt by God the Holy Spirit. Every one of us has the full enablement of God residing within us (John 14:17). In the Old Testament, there was grace, but obviously the grace of personal enablement was nothing in the Old Testament compared to what it is today. So again I remind you that from the very first, the grace of God was in operation--from the first dispensation. It moved along through every dispensation in mounting effect. So God helped people to perform certain special functions through the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament. However, the Holy Spirit came, and he went. He didn't stick with the person permanently. With you and me, it's a permanent relationship which therefore indicates a fantastic advance of the grace of God upon us today over what it was in the Old Testament law era.

Grace was also displayed in the law era in the revelation of God as Jehovah. God had not revealed Himself by this particular unique name as Jehovah. This is a name which is connected with many specific acts of God's gracious blessing. We have this described in Psalm 143:11 and in Jeremiah 14:21. And just to top this off, there is a Hebrew word in the Old Testament "chesed." "Chesed" is a tremendous word that is usually translated as "loving kindness," or "grace." We have many times in the Old Testament where God says that "chesed" will not depart from them. It's linked, for example, with the Abrahamic Covenant in Micah 7:20--God's loving kindness. It's linked with the Mosaic Covenant in Exodus 34:6-7. It's linked with the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:3. It's also linked with the Davidic Covenant in Isaiah 55:3. David is assured that God's "chesed" (His loving kindness--His grace) would not be frustrated, nor would the covenant that God made with David be altered. You can read about this in Psalm 89:33-34 where God specifically says, "David, my grace will never depart from you."

So you'd have to be dumb, blind, and everything else not to see that the Old Testament is filled with the grace of God. Now mind you. Remember what I said to begin with. We, as dispensationalists, say, "Yes, people were saved by grace in the Old Testament. The non-dispensationalists (the amillennialist) says, "Oh, yes, you're saying that now, but you can't show that in the Old Testament. That doesn't come out of your theology. You don't believe that there was grace operating in the Old Testament." Well, I hope you've seen from this brief review that there was considerable grace all the way through from the very first. It was not like it is today, but alongside of the law system there was grace. The Bible itself makes a contrast between the law system as a way of life and the grace system as a way of life. This does not mean that they did not exist there. The Bible is very clear that God's loving kindness is going to be involved with His Jewish people without end.

Well, the law was indeed an exacting system in spite of the fact that God's grace was there functioning. It is in sharp contrast to our era today where God's grace dominates and we're not under a works system to keep a relationship with God of any kind. The Bible stresses the antithesis between the dispensation of the Jews under the law and the dispensation of the church under grace. You cannot ignore that contrast. The law was a source of blessing, and that in itself is the grace of God.

Now let's take a look at this doctrine of salvation itself. I think we've established that we as premillennialists (as dispensationalists) can legitimately say that we believe that the grace of God existed in the Old Testament. If the grace of God existed in the Old Testament, then it is possible for a person to have been saved by grace through faith in the Old Testament just as he is saved today, and in every era before the time of the Jews.

**The Covenant Theologian's View of Salvation**

Let's first look at the position of Covenant Theology on salvation. The Covenant Theologian insists that salvation in each dispensation was by faith. But by faith in what? As you know, faith is meaningless in itself. Faith has value in its object. You could ask an amillennialist theologian, "Now how were people saved the Old Testament?" He'd say, "By faith." You would say, "By faith in what?" He would say, "By faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the God man who came to provide salvation and atonement through the cross." You would say, "Is that what Abraham understood about the God man Jesus Christ coming to die on the cross?" And the amillennialist theologian would say, "Exactly. That's exactly what he understood." And you would say, "And is that what David understood?" He would say, "That's exactly what David understood--redemption through Christ who is coming to die on the cross." Now get that. The amillennialist is saying that salvation in the Old Testament was by faith in Christ as the substitute for our sins upon the cross.

You could ask the amillennialist, "Where do you get that?" He'll say, "Why that was evident from the sacrifices. What do you think the animal sacrifices were portraying?" That's true. They did portray that, didn't they? But there's a joker in the deck. And that joker is, did the people who were bringing the sacrifices know that that's what those sacrifices were representing? Do you have one iota of Scripture to indicate that they understood when they brought their sacrifices that this is what this represented--the coming death of the God man Jesus Christ, the second member of the Trinity, upon the cross? They also say that they base it upon certain Scriptures such as John 8:56. These are almost always quoted to you if you carry on this discussion with an amillennialist. John 8:56 says, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad." And the amillennialist says, "There you go, you see, they saw Jesus Christ. Abraham saw Jesus Christ very clearly and knew of His dying on the cross. He knew all about Him and what He was going to do."

Another verse that they will bring is Psalm 16:11: "You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand there are pleasures for evermore." They say, "You see, God showed the people of the Old Testament very clearly the path of life, and the path of life was through faith in Christ in His sacrifice upon the cross." And one of the favorites is, of course, Job 19:25 which says, "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."

Now these verses and the meaning of the animal sacrifices are presented as evidence that the Jews understood the fullness of the object of salvation that you and I understand today. However, the truth of the matter is that nowhere in the Word of God do we have indicated that the Jews had this kind of understanding. The death of Christ, as a person of the Trinity, for the sins of the world was not clearly understood by the Jews. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of the Trinity was not clearly understood by the Jews, let alone the doctrine of the incarnation of the second person of the Trinity--His crucifixion and His resurrection.

Covenant Theology is simply wrong in suggesting that the saints held Jesus Christ as the conscious object of their faith in the Old Testament. What they are trying to do is to make salvation the same in the Old Testament as it is for us today. How are they going to do that? By trying to suggest that the people of the Old Testament understood what we are able to explain to you concerning the object of your faith if you want to be saved. Well, we have all the revelation of the New Testament. We are after the cross. We know how God fulfilled His plan of Genesis 3:15. We know how He executed what He promised to Adam and Eve. However, they did not know that back there. They did not know how to interpret their sacrifices though they did reflect this thing. They didn't know the full meaning of these sacrifices. This is an assumption that is not justified and cannot be defended by what we find in Scripture concerning what the people understood.

**The Dispensationalist's View of Salvation**

That's what the Covenant Theologian says about salvation in the Old Testament. What do we, as dispensationalists, say about salvation in the Old Testament? Well, first of all, we say that the basis of salvation in the Old Testament was the death of Christ for the sins of the world. That was the basis. That's the basis in every dispensation. Secondly, we say that the requirement for salvation in every dispensation is faith. You are always saved through faith alone. Third, the object of faith in every dispensation is God. If you're going to be saved, you have to have faith in God. Now the content of faith is where we part company with the amillennialists. We claim that the content changes in the various dispensations.

**Progressive Revelation**

This is the doctrine of progressive revelation. As revelation unfolded through the ages, the picture became clear as to the content of what God was doing. We are told that a person in the Old Testament, such as Abraham, believed God. He had faith in God. It was accounted to him for righteousness. He was saved. We are not told that Abraham had faith in Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God sacrifice for the sins of the world upon a cross in crucifixion. Adam and Eve did not look at their animal coats and say, "Oh, I see how God is going to provide this salvation that He has promised. It will be through the sacrifice of the second person of the Godhead." They did not fully understand what those coats meant. They perhaps did grasp the fact that God has covered the outward evidence of our sin, and He is going to provide some kind of covering, and we believe Him. We have no indication that the specifics of that were spelled out to them. Revelation had not progressed that far up to that time. God sees salvation in its totality, while man only sees a limited area of salvation. Man sees it in a limited content, where God sees the whole thing.

**Dallas Theological Seminary's View of Old Testament Salvation**

Here is the Dallas Theological Seminary's doctrinal statement concerning the question of salvation, which puts it very well: "We believe that according to the eternal purpose of God (Ephesians 3:11), salvation in the divine reckoning is always by grace through faith and rests upon the shed blood of Christ. We believe that God has always been gracious regardless of the ruling dispensation, but that man has not at all times been under an administration or stewardship of grace as is true in the present dispensation. We believe that the principle of faith was prevalent in the lives of all the Old Testament saints. However, we believe that it was historically impossible that they should have had as the conscious object of their faith the incarnate crucified Christ, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and that it is evident that they did not comprehend as we do that the sacrifices depicted the person and work of Christ." That's a very good statement, and very ably declares the situation as it existed in the Old Testament.

So there is a difference between the basis of salvation, which is by grace in every age, and the content of the revelation which forms the object of faith in every dispensation. The content of revelation did vary from dispensation to dispensation. How much people understood the details of how God was going to accomplish this, that varied. However, the fact that God was going to do it, and that they had to trust Him by faith to do it, that was the same in every dispensation. So, very legitimately, we, as premillennial dispensationalists, declare that salvation is the same in every dispensation, and that it is possible to be saved by grace in every dispensation because the grace of God was functioning in every dispensation. People in ages past just did not understand as fully as we do today how God was proceeding to accomplish this salvation.

God is always gracious, but he does not always reveal grace in the same manner or the same amount. The Covenant Theologian does not account for the fact that the Bible stresses that grace before Jesus Christ came was nothing compared to what it was after He came (1 Peter 1:10, John 1:17). So it is the Covenant Theologian who has really created his own problem of supposing that we teach multiple ways of salvation. This is because he is the one who assumes that people in the Old Testament knew everything we know, and he is the one who is suggesting that we are claiming that grace did not exist in the Old Testament. It did exist, but they didn't understand the full content of salvation. Naturally, we would say, "Well, why does he think that?" He makes the mistake for the following reason.

Because we say that in every dispensation, God arranges His world household in certain ways that God is testing mankind under that arrangement. As man goes through that dispensation, certain variations will take place, but God is always testing. The Covenant Theologian assumes that because we say that God is testing men in different ways in every dispensation, that we are saying that there are different ways of salvation. He assumes that the only test that God has in every dispensation is relative to whether you're going to heaven or hell. However, that happens to be just one of the tests. That's one of the tests concerning the revelation that God has made up to that time. In this test, man is tested concerning that revelation which, if he believes, will give him eternal life. But that's only one of the tests. God has many other tests in a dispensation which face man in order to demonstrate that man is unrighteous, and that man needs a salvation that comes by grace.

The law provided for man's temporal fellowship as well as his eternal fellowship. For example, when I say that the law provided for man's fellowship in time with God, you know that if a person broke the Sabbath, his temporal fellowship was broken, and it meant physical death for him. But if he kept the Sabbath, that meant that he would stay alive and nobody would kill him. Therefore, keeping the laws of the Sabbath secured for the Old Testament saint physical life. It did not secure for him spiritual life. Notice the difference. It did not secure a spiritual life just because he kept the Sabbath. But it did preserve him from physical death. So the means of eternal life was by grace, but the means of his temporal life was by keeping the law. The revelation of the means to eternal life was through the law. It was the law that revealed man's need for Christ, and it revealed the sacrifice of Christ through those sacrifices of the animals. But the law, while revealing salvation, was not the means to salvation. The law could not save (Romans 3:20, 2 Corinthians 3:6-7). The sacrifices did not save a person, but what they taught could bring a person to salvation to the extent that he understood it.

So what was revealed as a means of salvation through the law system, which we more fully understand this side of the cross, was not clear as revelation to those on the other side of the cross. What was the purpose of the Old Testament sacrifices? That's the next thing you're going to want to know. Well, why did they have all of these sacrifices? Rivers of blood were shed from these animals that were killed. What good did it do for a person to offer sacrifice? Well, the law says that sacrificing an animal will secure forgiveness of your sins. I want to establish that. Did you get that? The law says that for sacrificing an animal, it will bring you forgiveness of sins (Leviticus 1:4, Leviticus 4:26-31, Leviticus 16:20-22). We don't have time here to pursue those supporting passages, but read them on your own and you will see that these verses very clearly say that if a person brings a sacrifice, his sins will be forgiven.

Now these passages do not teach that the effectiveness of these sacrifices depends upon the spiritual state of the person offering them. You won't find that they say, "These sacrifices will bring you forgiveness for your sins if you are acting in faith." It makes no stipulation about the individual. It just says, "You bring the sacrifice according to the prescribed rules of the law, and you'll be forgiven for your sins." It doesn't even indicate that the person bringing the sacrifice had to understand what the sacrifice represented. The sacrifices were valued simply in themselves. All they had to be was offered, and the Bible is very clear on this. But the Bible is also very clear on the fact that sacrifices of animals cannot provide eternal life for anybody (Hebrews 10:1, 4). You cannot secure eternal life through sacrificing of animals.

So now you seem to have a kind of a serious contradiction here between the Old Testament statements that sacrifices do bring forgiveness of sins, and the New Testament statements that sacrifices of animals cannot secure eternal life for you. Well, you have to understand this by remembering that the Jew, when he was born into a Jewish family under the Old Testament system, was born also as part of the Commonwealth of Israel. He was born into a theocratic nation. A theocratic nation is a nation over which God rules. The minute you were born as a Jewish baby, you were part of a relationship to God who was your governmental head. This was regardless of whatever kind of a person you were. You may have been the greatest bum that ever breathed a breath on the face of the earth, but you had a theocratic relationship to God by the fact that you were born into this nation. Your citizenship in this nation was something that you could not dispose of. There was no way that you could detach yourself from your relationship to God who was head of the nation.

So when you as a Jew sinned, you had a twofold problem. Your sin offended your relationship on a government basis to your head of your government, Jesus Christ. And it also created a problem of guilt for sin relative to God in a spiritual sense. In other words, it was as if you and I lived today, and every time we did something wrong, we were guilty of sin toward the president of the United States and God at the same time (heaven forbid). That was the arrangement. You were guilty of sin toward the head of the nation, and toward God who is the head of the universe. The Jew was guilty of sin toward God as the head of his nation. Therefore, in a governmental sense, apart from his own personal spiritual life condition of salvation, he was also guilty of sin relative to God in a spiritual sense. So, while all Jews were related to God government-wise, only those who were born again were related to God spiritually. So Paul says, "They are not all Israel who are of Israel." They all belong to a relationship to God governmentally, but not spiritually.

**Animal Sacrifices of the Old Testament**

Now what did the sacrifices do? The sacrifices of the animals did not forgive your sins relative to your guilt with God spiritually, but they did forgive your sins relative to your offending the head of your government, God, who ruled that nation. When you brought that sacrifice, because of what that sacrifice represented of what God was going to do for the sins of the world, you were automatically forgiven in time. You maintain temporal fellowship with God through these animal sacrifices, just as we do today through the use of 1 John 1:9. It settled your temporal relationship. In the dispensation of the church today, we have no theocratic relationship. All of our relationships are with God directly. They are spiritual. They are not governmental. Sin is viewed in a direct relationship to God, and the work of Christ on the cross is the only thing that will secure forgiveness for us in this age.

The book of Hebrews, you'll remember, does not deny that sins were forgiven by animal sacrifices. What you find as you read the book of Hebrews is that it denies that the sacrifices of the animals were sufficient to secure forgiveness unto eternal life. It does not say that they did not secure forgiveness in relationship to your governmental response to God who was head of the nation.

So the Jews in the Old Testament did not automatically receive spiritual salvation through the bringing of the sacrifices--just temporal salvation, or temporal fellowship. The Old Testament sacrifices, however, did serve to point the Jew, to the extent that he could understand, to the meaning of the symbol toward God and toward Christ who was to come.

Covenant Theology is reading the New Testament back into the Old Testament, so it is stumbling on progressive revelation. It is suggesting that those people knew the full content of salvation as we know it today, and that's what they had faith in, and that's not true. In Acts 17:30, Paul speaks about the Old Testament as "the times of ignorance"--not times of clear understanding. These were the times when God was winking at sin. He was passing over it, preparatory to what He would cover later. The Old Testament salvation was remission of sins that are passed over through the forbearance of God (Romans 3:25). He was temporarily waiting. He had not provided the ground. However, there was forgiveness immediately provided for the Jew in his governmental relationships to God.

One thing more was that the Jews understood very little even when Jesus was here concerning his role as Messiah. You may read John 1:21 and John 7:40. 1 Peter 1:10-11 indicate that even the prophets did not really understand Christ in terms of Messiah in the full content as we understand it today.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1970

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