

What was the Old Testament way of salvation?

How people were saved during the time of the Old Testament is a confusing question to some. We know that, in the New Testament era, salvation comes by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Ephesians 2:8-9). Jesus is the Way (John 14:6). But, before Christ, what was the way?

A common misconception about the Old Testament way of salvation is that Jews were saved by keeping the Law. But we know from Scripture that that is not true. Galatians 3:11 says, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for 'The righteous shall live by faith.'" Some might want to dismiss this passage as only applying to the New Testament, but Paul is quoting Habakkuk 2:4—salvation by faith, apart from the Law was an *Old Testament* principle. Paul taught that the purpose of the Law was to serve as a "tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Galatians 3:24). Also, in Romans 3:20 Paul makes the point that keeping the Law did not save either Old or New Testament Jews because "no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law." The Law was never intended to save anyone; the purpose of the Law was to make us "conscious of sin."

If the Old Testament way of salvation was not keeping the Law, then how were people saved? Fortunately, the answer to that question is easily found in Scripture, so there can be no doubt as to what was the Old Testament way of salvation. In Romans 4 the apostle Shaul (Paul) makes it very clear that the Old Testament way of salvation was the same as the New Testament way, which is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. To prove this, Paul points us to Abraham, who was saved by faith: "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Romans 4:3). Again, Paul quotes the Old Testament to prove his point—Genesis 15:6, this time. Abraham could not have been saved by keeping the Law, because he lived over 400 years before the Law was given!

Paul then shows that David was also saved by faith (Romans 4:6-8, quoting Psalm 32:1-2). Paul continues to establish that the Old Testament way of salvation was through faith alone. In Romans 4:23-24 he writes, "The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." In other words, righteousness is "credited" or given to those who have faith in God—Abraham, David, and we all share the same way of salvation.

Much of Romans and Galatians addresses the fact that there is only one way of salvation and only one gospel message. Throughout history people have tried to pervert the gospel by adding human works to it, requiring certain things to be done to "earn" salvation. But the Bible's clear message is that the way of salvation has always been through faith. In the Old Testament, it was faith in the promise that God would send a Savior someday. Those who lived in the time of the Old Testament looked forward to the Messiah and believed God's promise of the coming Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 53). Those who exercised such faith were saved. Today we look back on the life, death and resurrection of the Savior and are saved by faith in Jesus Christ's atonement for our sins (Romans 10:9-10).

The gospel is not an exclusively New Testament message. The Old Testament contained it as well: “The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Galatians 3:8-9, quoting Genesis 12:3).

As early as Genesis 3:15, we see the promise of a coming Savior, and throughout the Old Testament there are hundreds of promises that the Messiah would “save His people from their sins” (Matthew 1:21; cf. Isaiah 53:5-6). Job’s faith was in the fact that he knew that his “Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25). Clearly, Old Testament saints were aware of the promised Redeemer, and they were saved by faith in that Savior, the same way people are saved today. There is no other way. Jesus is “the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.’ Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12, quoting Psalm 118:22).