

The Church of the Servant King Soteriology Series

SO_3_Just What is the Gospel of Salvation? – Part 1

When studying the category of doctrines known as soteriology, there is no wrong place to begin. Soteriology is a sphere of interconnected Biblical concepts and doctrines. The essence of God is the unifying agent. I chose to cover this topic – ‘Just What is the Gospel of Salvation?’ early in this series since the remainder of the doctrines and issues in this study either explain truths related to what Christ accomplished on the Cross or they explain the effect in the believer's life.

Salvation After the Death of Christ

In this study, we are focusing upon salvation after the death of Christ instead of salvation in the ages prior to Christ's death on the Cross. Regardless of the age (dispensation), salvation is always accomplished via the work of Christ. The gospel message has changed based upon the dispensation; however, the means of salvation has remained the same, i.e. the Messiah, Jesus Christ. The following passages (among others) establish an interconnected trail through the Ages that provides evidence that the faith expressed by believers via sacrificial offerings of worship has as its object the same Person, i.e. the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Prior to the Cross, that faith was forward looking. After the Cross, that faith was backward looking.

And I will put enmity between you [*Satan*] and the woman [*Eve*], and between your seed [*unbelievers (see John 8:37-47)*] and her Seed [*the Messiah (see Num 24:7; Isa 6:13)*]; He [*the Messiah*] shall bruise your head [*strategic defeat via the Cross and resurrection*], and you shall bruise His heel [*tactical opposition throughout history especially the Cross – a painful, but temporary setback*]. (Gen 3:15) **First promise of a deliverer (i.e. Messiah).**

Also for Adam and his wife the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them. (Gen 3:21) **First sacrifice for sin – a pattern to be repeated in anticipation of the fulfillment of the promise in Genesis 3:15.**

Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. (Gen 4:4a) **The pattern of sacrifice as pattern of worship (looking forward to the Messiah's sacrifice – not forgiveness) is documented. Abel's sacrifice was accepted because of the attitude behind it. Cain's was rejected because of the lack of faith, not because of its content. Later, the Mosaic Law allowed for offerings that did not involve the shedding of blood as a symbol of worship.**

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (Gen 8:20) **Noah continues the pattern of worship offerings in the Age of the Gentiles – Human Government. Question: Who instructed Noah regarding what animals were “clean” and how to make the offering? Answer: Most likely, his instruction consisted of a combination of Yahweh's instruction to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:21) passed on through oral tradition to the patriarchal heads of families.**

Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your descendants I will give this land.” And there he built an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. And he moved from there to the mountain east of Bethel and he pitched his tent with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; there he built an altar to the Lord and

called on the name of the Lord. (Gen 12:7-8) **Abram, who is to become the father of God's chosen people and establish the pattern of faith in Yahweh to be followed by Israel as a nation, continues the pattern during the Age of Israel – Age of Promise preceding the giving of the Mosaic Law that would institute the Age of Israel – Age of the Law.**

Speak to all the congregation of Israel, saying "On the tenth of this month every man shall take for himself a lamb, according to the house of his father, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for the lamb, let him and his neighbor next to his house take it according to the number of the persons; according to each man's need you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats. Now you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of the same month. Then the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it at twilight. And they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and on the lintel of the houses where they eat it. (Ex 12:3-8) **The pattern continues with Moses and Israel and is formalized in the Passover feast.**

An altar of earth you shall make for Me, and you shall sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I record My name I will come to you, and I will bless you. And if you make Me an altar of stone, you shall not build it of hewn stone; for if you use your tool on it you have profaned it. Nor shall you go up by steps to My altar that your nakedness may not be exposed on it. (Ex 20:24-26) **The pattern continues with the Mosaic Law that governed Israel. Many other passages describe in detail the requirements for sacrifice in the Tabernacle and eventually the Temple. The Law was not designed to provide salvation. It was designed to be used by a believing people to demonstrate their faith in the God (Yahweh) Who saves. The Law was given to a people who had already believed (see Ex 14:31).**

For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast [a reference to the Mosaic Law based upon the context of the passage], and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at first began to be spoken by the Lord [in His earthly ministry], and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him [apostles]. (Heb 2:2-3) **A connection is made between the message of salvation to Israel through the Mosaic Law and the message of salvation preached by Jesus during His earthly ministry and the apostles of the Church.**

So, the object of saving faith has not changed through all dispensations of history. This principle will be equally true in the last days of Israel known as the Tribulation and also during the Messianic, Millennial reign of Christ. The object is the Messiah or Jesus Christ. However, the message has taken on different forms throughout the Ages all of which center upon faith in Jesus as the Son of God, the only acceptable sacrifice to a perfectly righteous God. The following list contains some examples of gospels (福音 – good news messages) relevant to soteriology.¹

- *Gospel of God* – this is a general designation and can be applied to any message of good news which originates with God. Paul uses the phrase six times and Peter uses it once.

¹ These categories and the descriptions associated with them were for the most part obtained from Charles F. Baker, *A Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Grace Publications, 1994), 331-337. Some alterations were made for clarification.

*The **gospel of God** is inter-dispensational in nature* – In Romans 1:1-4, Paul makes a definite connection between this *gospel of God* and the promises of the Old Testament (OT) fulfilled in the person of Christ. His description in Romans 1:1-4 of this *gospel of God* is practically equivalent to his description of the gospel that he preached to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 "...how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he arose again the third day according to the Scriptures." This is the salvation message that is inter-dispensational in nature.

Since it is inter-dispensational in nature, it is akin to the expression, the *church of God*, a term which is used to designate both Age of Israel saints (Neh 13:1 Septuagint; Matt 16:18; 18:17) and members of the body of Christ (1 Co 1:2).

- *Paul's 'My Gospel' or the Gospel of the Mystery* – This is the good news concerning the mystery doctrines of the Church Age which were revealed to Paul first among the apostles. It was not revealed to the other apostles except as Paul relayed it to them.

This set of truths that Paul called a mystery is **not simply** that God would one day save Gentiles as well as Jews. The OT is full of predictions of the salvation of Gentiles and many Gentiles became Jewish proselytes. Rather, **it is** a reference to that set of spiritual blessings unique to the Church Age believer and not previously revealed to or experienced by believers of prior dispensations. The gospel of the mystery is vitally related to the Person and Work of Christ since it is faith in His Work on the Cross alone that places the believer into the **Body of Christ** (a truth unique to the Church Age believer). See Romans 16:25-26 cf. 2:16; Ephesians 6:19; and 2 Timothy 2:8.

- *The Gospel of the Grace of God* – This designation occurs only once (Acts 20:24) and is another name for the gospel that was committed to Paul. It is called the *gospel of the grace of God* not because there was no grace available under the Law, but because Israel rejected the opportunity en masse to accept the gospel of the kingdom. As a result, a new people, the Church consisting of both Jew and Gentile has been established and a new dispensation has been intercalated into history. Compare Romans 11:12, 15, 28 with Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 3:2.
- *The Gospel of Christ* – This is a general description and points to the fact that Christ is the object of faith. It is a term similar to the *gospel of God* and could be applied to Israel's *gospel of the kingdom*, since Christ is also the object of faith in that message. Paul calls his gospel the *gospel of Christ* at least ten times (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 9:12, 18; 2 Cor 2:12; 9:13; 10:14; Gal 1:7; Phil 1:27; 1 Thess 3:2).
- *The Gospel of Peace* – Peace is characteristic of the gospel preached in the Church Age and *gospel of the kingdom*. Paul uses the phrase *the gospel of peace* in Romans 10:15 and Ephesians 6:15 and Isaiah used the phrase in Isaiah 52:7 in reference to the Messianic kingdom.

Since peace is a characteristic of both Paul's gospel and the Messianic kingdom proclaimed in Isaiah's message as well as the message of Jesus and the apostles (i.e. the gospel of the kingdom – see below), we once again see the continuity (i.e. the object of the gospel) as well as the discontinuity (i.e. the message content based upon dispensation) within the gospel message.

- *The Gospel of the Uncircumcision* – This is a term coined by Paul to distinguish his gospel from that which was first committed to the twelve apostles. Paul mentions this distinction in order to relate how God had given him a special revelation to go up to Jerusalem in order to communicate to the other apostles the truths concerning that gospel which he was preaching among the Gentiles (Gal 2:1-9). It should be fairly self-evident from the passage that this was not a message that Paul had received from the

other apostles since there would have been no reason to explain to the believers in Jerusalem the nature of the gospel he preached if it was the same. They were informed of this gospel through Paul. Regardless, his gospel message, even though different, still centered upon the Person and work of Jesus Christ, just as did other gospel messages.

- *The Gospel of the Circumcision* – This is a phrase to distinguish the gospel which had been committed to Peter from Paul's *gospel of the uncircumcision*.

Evidently, the *gospel of the circumcision* included an explanation of the fact that Israel, the chosen nation and participants in the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham (Gen 17), was now experiencing a delay in the fulfillment of those covenant blessings. The delay in fulfillment was due to Israel's rejection en masse of *the gospel of the kingdom* presented both prior to (e.g. Matt 4:23; 9:35; 24:14) and after Jesus' death (e.g. Matt 16:18-19 cf. Acts 1:3; 3:19).²

The *gospel of the circumcision* is not another way of being saved. It was a different means of presenting the message of salvation through the Messiah, Jesus Christ, to a particular group of people (the Jews) who had been under a different spiritual program, i.e. God's chosen race and nation. The covenant of circumcision was an everlasting covenant with a select group of people in contrast to the new people of the Church, the body of Christ, consisting of both Jew and Gentile.

- *The Gospel of the Kingdom* – This gospel is connected to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7) and was directed to the Jews. This gospel has as its subject the same Person as any other gospel in any other dispensation. The particular phrase "gospel of the kingdom" is only used in Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14 and Mark uses the phrase "gospel of the kingdom of God" in Mark 1:14. The focus of this gospel message is the good news that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the OT and the One Who would establish His kingdom on earth in fulfillment of all covenants with Israel.

The Essential Elements of the Salvation Gospel of the Church Age Believer

There are many occasions in the Bible where the term *gospel* is used without any qualifying terms attached (e.g. Mk 1:1; 13:10; Ro 1:16; 1 Co 9:14; 2 Co 4:3; Gal 1:6; Eph 1:13; 6:19; Col 1:23; Re 14:6). In those instances, context will determine the nature of the gospel message. Regardless of the gospel message, the means of salvation has always involved faith in Yahweh's (God's) provision, apart from human merit, in His Son. Any message that distorts this truth and shifts focus away from Jesus as the Son of God and acceptable sacrifice Who paid in full the penalty for sin and thus became our Savior is Satanic in origin. The essential elements of the salvation gospel for the Church Age believer consists of the following:³

- Jesus' death on the Cross is the only acceptable payment to God in satisfaction of the penalty of sin (Heb 9:11-14)
- Jesus is the Son of God, i.e. deity (1 Jn 1:1-4; 4:1-3)
- Jesus is perfect humanity, without sin (Matt 4:2; 8:24; Jn 4:6; 19:28; Lu 2:1-7, 21 cf. Heb 4:15; 7:26; 2 Jn 7)

² For more information on this period of transition between the Age of Israel and the Church Age, see the notes entitled "Special: the Transition Period Between the Age of Israel and the Church" that was taught in the *Survey of the Bible – Matthew* series.

³ Actually, these same elements are present in the gospel contained in OT passages as well as New Testament (NT) passages that span dispensations. Examples include the passages listed in the early section of this lesson combined with other passages such as Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12 not to mention Isaiah 7:14 – "...behold, the virgin shall conceive..." – which is a prophecy with both immediate and distant implications for Israel (as well as Gentiles) at the time it was made.

- Trust in Christ's work, not human merit, is vital to the salvation gospel in this Church Age (Rom 3:21-26 cf. Rev 20:12-15)