

The work of the Lord Jesus Christ is described in Hebrews 2:3 as “*such a great salvation*”. Before becoming Christians we fail to see anything particularly great about it, but on finding the Lord Jesus as our Saviour we begin to discover what a wonderful thing it is to be saved: ‘ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like we His praise should sing?’ So let us consider some of the great things to do with our salvation. Note that it is:

A DIVINELY-PLANNED SALVATION

As I write this, we are still living through the Covid-19 pandemic, though thankfully many of us have now received our jabs. In other parts of the world, however, vaccines are in short supply, medical facilities are unable to cope with the spread of the virus and vast numbers of people live under the threat of serious illness and even death.

We hear regularly of the threat that the pandemic poses, yet the greatest threat to the world is hardly ever mentioned! That is the constant and deepening rebellion of the human race against God and His law, resulting in God’s deserved judgement. This rebellion began in the garden of Eden, when “*sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned*” (Rom 5:12). The wonderful good news, however, is that God had already planned His great salvation for humanity.

The pivotal point of God’s plan of salvation was to be the giving, death and resurrection of God’s own dear Son. The salvation of the world was to be accomplished through the “*precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without blemish or spot. He was foreknown before the foundation of the world*” (1 Peter 1:19,20). That is why, immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God was able to tell them His plan to “*put enmity between you [the devil and his kingdom of darkness] and the woman [representing the human race] and between your offspring and her offspring [the incarnate Lord Jesus]; he shall bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.*” (Gen 3:15) We must always remember that God’s plan of salvation was never a ‘knee-jerk’ reaction to the Fall: it had been planned from all eternity, so God was able to predict it!

A VIVIDLY-PICTURED SALVATION

A very clear evidence that God’s great salvation had been eternally planned is seen in the way it was graphically illustrated all through the Old Testament. God warned Noah of His coming judgement and gave him plans for the ark. We are told that “*By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household.*” (Heb 11:7) During its construction, Noah was a gospel preacher, a “*herald of righteousness*” (2 Peter 2:5), and the ark itself also bore testimony to the need of shelter from God’s justice on the day of judgement.

Then we have the example of Abraham being called to “*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love ... and offer him there as a burnt offering*” (Gen 22). It would be very difficult to imagine a more striking illustration of God’s plan of salvation to be achieved through the offering of His one and only Son.

Then we have the most enduring picture of salvation in the Passover (Exodus 12). Painting the blood of a slain lamb on the door-frame of the Israelite dwellings was a graphic illustration of the need of the covering in blood of the Lamb of God in order to come safely through the judgement of God. Jewish people still celebrate Passover after all these years.

There is the outstanding picture of salvation in the construction of the tabernacle and, later, the temple. The whole sacrificial system, including the institution of the priesthood and high priest, together with the basin for cleansing, the golden candlestick, the altar of incense, the holy of holies with the mercy seat, the ritual of the Day of Atonement – all of these, and more, were designed deliberately by God to “*serve [as] a copy and shadow of the heavenly things*”, so Moses “*was instructed by God, saying, “See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”*” (Heb 8:5). God placed such powerful and constant pictures of His plan of redemption at the very centre of the life of the nation of Israel.

Then there are the pictures of the manna from heaven; of water from the rock and the bronze snake lifted up on a pole; of Jonah released from his watery grave on the third day. God is such a wonderful God to have given to the world, for the last three and half thousand years, such amazingly vivid pictures of His great plan of salvation – and they are all there for us to read about in the pages of the Old Testament.

The fact that all this is in the Old Testament shows how wrong it is to think that the first part of the Bible is only about God’s wrath and then the New Testament is about His love! The whole Bible is full of God’s great plan of salvation, so let’s keep on reading both testaments, asking Him to “*Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law.*” (Ps 119:18) The significance of John the Baptist’s statement, “*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29) can be understood only as we see Him portrayed throughout the Old Testament.

A PLAINLY-PROPHESIED SALVATION

Perhaps even stronger evidence of the fact that salvation was planned by the sovereign God is found in the abundance of Old Testament prophecies regarding it. This was certainly a matter of very real confidence for the apostle Peter. He had no doubt that “*Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and enquired carefully, enquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.*” (1 Peter 1:10,11) The apostle Paul also was inspired to point out that “*Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures*” (1 Cor 15:3,4). And for Paul, of course, ‘the Scriptures’ was what we now call the Old Testament.

Both Peter and Paul are telling us that, when it comes to God's great plan of salvation, it is all there in the Old Testament! The New Testament then takes up that plan, records how it was implemented in the Lord Jesus Christ, and explains further its implications for the world – ourselves included. Here are just a few such references:

Psalms 22 prophesied in great detail how Jesus would look, and in what circumstances He would die, over 900 years before the event. Micah prophesied the place of Jesus's birth (Mic 5:2), and Isaiah the major features of His life, death and resurrection (Is 53) – both of them about 700 years beforehand. Zechariah, writing about 500 BC, foretold the triumphal entry (Zech 9:9). There are many more such prophecies concerning our great salvation, all demonstrating that it was God's wonderful plan from eternity.

In the light of the fact that salvation is God's eternal plan, we might ask, "Why did He take all those centuries giving pictures and prophecies about it?" Could He not have "*sent his Son into the world that the world might be saved through him*" (John 3:17) immediately after the fall, the flood or the exodus? No doubt He could, and a variety of suggestions have been made as to why He did not, but the actual answer is hidden away in the mind of God the Father. What we can say with absolute certainty is that "*when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law*" and that that 'fulness of time' was "*the date set by his father*" (Gal 4:2–5). The whole history of salvation was in God's great plan.

I think it is also fair to say that throughout the many years given by God to picturing and prophesying His great salvation, He has been providing the human race with:

➤ **time for education**

Adam and Eve needed time to learn the awful consequences of their rebellion: the damage to their relationships with God and with each other; the hardship of working the cursed ground; the pains of having and rearing children; the awful results of jealousy, leading to murder; and so on. As the human race expanded, it needed to learn the dire consequences of wickedness, which resulted in the flood; the futility of pride in its own achievements and plans outside God's will, as seen at the tower of Babel; and on and on! It is interesting to notice that the writer to the Hebrews points out that, in Old Testament times, the sacrifices were "*a reminder of sins every year.*" (Heb 10:3) The tragedy is that, by and large, humanity still has not learned the fundamental and vital lesson that God is a God who keeps His promises of retribution as well as those of blessing. Sadly, the human race is extremely slow to learn the lessons of its rebellion against its Creator and how He planned for its great salvation!

➤ **time for recognition**

All the Old Testament pictures and prophecies were given to prepare the world to receive and recognise God's Saviour. One of the world's greatest catastrophes is that the Saviour came into the world, "*yet the world did not know him*"!

That was certainly true of the vast majority of the Jewish nation, for "*He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*" (John 1:10,11) When Jesus was in Nazareth, where He had been brought up, He quoted Isaiah's prophecy concerning Himself: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*" (Luke 4:18–19, quoting from Is 61:1–2) But such was the depth of the failure to recognise God's anointed Son, that "*all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.*" (Luke 4:28,29)

In just the same way to this day, generally speaking, the world continues to refuse to recognise Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ of God, as its Saviour.

➤ **time for conversion**

On the day of Pentecost, in preaching the gospel, Peter reminded the crowds gathered in Jerusalem of many Old Testament prophecies pointing to God's great plan of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Then he declared how Jesus had been rejected and crucified. The result was that a large number were "*cut to the heart, and said, Brothers, what shall we do?*" Peter's prompt response was, "*Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins*" (Acts 2:37,38). A few years later, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write about how God, all through the centuries, had shown His "*kindness and forbearance and patience*", which included His giving numerous pictures and prophecies of His great salvation; and all because "*God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance*" (Rom 2:4,5).

There can be no question but that from before creation God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – planned His great salvation. It was "*In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will*" (Eph 1:4,5). Paul reminded Timothy that God "*saved us ... because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began*" (2 Tim 1:9). It is a marvellous truth that God was determined and passionate about saving sinful people even before He began to bring the universe into being. Furthermore, He is just as passionate about saving sinners today, and that includes people like you and me! Well, then, might we sing in wholehearted praise:

Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan!
Oh, the grace that brought it down to man!
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!
