



GOOD NEWS

for the unsaved WORLD!

(#149)
Forgiveness in the Old Testament.

1

What does the OLD Testament say about forgiveness?

A LOT!

This is the Bible the early church used! (The New Testament had not yet been written.)

But compared to the New Testament, there are some differences in focus.

- ✓ Some differences may occur because two different languages are used (Hebrew vs. Greek).
- ✓ The Old and New Covenants emphasize different things. Animal sacrifices for sin are no longer needed, because Jesus became the final sacrifice for sin.
- ✓ The New Covenant "kingdom of God" crosses all boundary lines; so forgiveness issues that pertain to nations are rarely found in the New Testament. (Acts 3:19-21 is addressed to Israel as a nation. Jesus will return after the nation repents.)

2

These differences have value!

- ✓ The language differences may result in differences of emphasis that complement each other (rather than contradict each other).
- ✓ The animal sacrifices teach us about the seriousness of sin (including the difference between "accidental" sin and "deliberate willful" sin). They were also a "picture" of what Jesus would accomplish on the cross, and they teach us the significance of what he did. [Due to time, we won't be looking at these issues.]
- ✓ Some of the warnings given to nations are probably relevant to our own nation, which has totally abandoned the true God, and has recklessly pursued moral corruption of all kinds. (This does not mean that all people in the nation are guilty. But certain types of consequences tend to affect both guilty and innocent.)

Here are FIVE of the things the Old Testament teaches us about FORGIVENESS.

3

① FORGIVENESS IS RELATED TO THE VERY NATURE OF GOD. BUT JUDGMENT ALSO IS!

- The judgment applies to those who refuse to repent; but there may also be unavoidable consequences for sin that must occur, even if forgiveness is present.

And [the Lord] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands,* and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."**

Exodus 34:6-7 (NIV)

* (This could refer to thousands of generations – as in Deuteronomy 7:9.)

** (① Children tend to follow their parent's sinful example. This doesn't rule out the possibility that some might repent. ALSO: ② Sin often has consequences that affect even those who are not guilty. We see this happen every day in the world around us.)

4

This is GOD's description of himself!

- ✓ Compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.
- ✓ Also forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.
- ✓ Not leaving the guilty unpunished.

- The prophets (and other godly people) sometimes referred to this when they prayed. They might be asking God to forgive the nation; or they might be praying about their own situation – as David does here:

You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you.
Hear my prayer, Lord;
listen to my cry for mercy.
Psalm 86:5-6 (NIV)

[This should be a warning to us: NEVER treat sin as a trivial matter!]

5

② IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, WE LEARN ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS TO NATIONS THAT ARE PERSISTENTLY DETERMINED TO REJECT GOD.

(The New Testament agrees – see the book of Revelation.)

- ✓ Compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.
- ✓ Also forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.
- ✓ Not leaving the guilty unpunished.

YES, God is forgiving ...

BUT HE ALSO DOESN'T LEAVE THE GUILTY UNPUNISHED.

- We see many examples in the Bible – both forgiveness of nations, and punishment of nations.
- The biggest difference between Israel and the other nations, is that God has promised to restore Israel, because of promises made to their ancestors. (They don't deserve it any more than any of the other nations do.)

6

Example: Nineveh

- The people repented in the days of Jonah, and God spared them.

God saw their actions—that they had turned from their evil ways—so God relented from the disaster he had threatened them with. And he did not do it.
Jonah 3:10 (CSB)

- 100 years later, they had returned to their evil ways, and reached the "point of no return."

The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished.
The Lord is good, ...

... but with an overwhelming flood he will make an end of Nineveh; ...
"I am against you," declares the Lord Almighty.
Nahum 1:3, 7a, 8a; 2:13a; 3:3b (NIV)

**GOODNESS
REQUIRES
JUSTICE.**

Many casualties, piles of dead, bodies without number, people stumbling over the corpses ...

7

Example: Israel and Judah

- They would sin, then repent and be forgiven, then sin again. Repeatedly, they would turn to even greater sin and rebellion—until they had broken their covenant with God in every imaginable way.
- Eventually, judgment could no longer be put off. The time for forgiveness was over. God had to keep his promise and *destroy* the nation—Northern Israel by the Assyrians; Judah by the Babylonians.

The LORD of Heaven's Armies has revealed this to me: "Till the day you die, **you will never be forgiven for this sin.**"
That is the judgment of the Lord, the LORD of Heaven's Armies.
Isaiah 22:14 (NLT)

- 70 years later, God *partially* restored Judah, in preparation for the coming of the Messiah (Jesus).
- In the future, the surviving remnants of the nation will repent and will be *completely* restored (Romans 11), under the *New Covenant* (the same covenant that we belong to).

8

③ WE FIND EXAMPLES OF GOD FORGIVING PEOPLE.

ETERNAL FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO REPENT.

- Some passages describe the *eternal* forgiveness that is experienced by the *saved*. These are given a greater emphasis in the New Testament.

I said, "I will **confess** my transgressions to the LORD," and you **forgave** the guilt of my sin.
Psalm 32:5b (CSB)

- The requirement for *eternal* forgiveness is the same here, as in the New Testament. We call it "repentance"—although it can be referred to by a variety of words, such as:

Then if my people who are called by my name will **humble** themselves and **pray** and **seek** my face and **turn** from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will **forgive** their sins and restore their land.
2 Chronicles 7:14 (NLT)

9

(In some passages, Scripture uses the word "PARDON.")

- This passage describes our God—the one who *pardons* and *forgives* (= parallel concepts).

Who is a God like you, who **pardons** sin and **forgives** the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance?
You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.
Micah 7:18 (NIV)

- The requirement for "being pardoned" is the same as for "being forgiven"—REPENTANCE (turning *from* evil and *to* God).

Let the wicked **forsake** their ways and the unrighteous their thoughts.
Let them **turn** to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely **pardon**.
Isaiah 55:7 (NIV)

10

TEMPORARY FORGIVENESS FOR THOSE WHO DON'T REPENT.

> **The guilty person asked.** <

Example: When God forgave Pharaoh.

God took away the plague, even though he knew that Pharaoh's "repentance" was temporary.

Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron. "I have sinned against the LORD your God and against you," he confessed. "**Forgive** my sin, just this once, and plead with the LORD your God to take away this death* from me."
Exodus 10:16-17 (NLT)

* ("Death"—referring to the end result, *if* the locust plague continued.)

NOTE: In the context, we also see the "interaction" of God's sovereignty and human responsibility. In Exodus 8:32, it is said that "**Pharaoh** hardened his heart." Here, the same type of response is described as "**The Lord** hardened Pharaoh's heart." Pharaoh, of course, willfully made his choices, and would have denied that Israel's God had anything to do with it.

11

> **An innocent person interceded.** <

Example: When Israel wanted to return to Egypt.

During one of Israel's rebellions in the wilderness, God threatened to destroy the nation. Moses interceded, using *God's description of himself* as the basis of his prayer.

"Now may the Lord's strength be displayed, just as you have declared: '**The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.**'"

In accordance with your great love, **forgive** the sin of these people, just as you have **pardoned** them from the time they left Egypt until now."
Numbers 14:17-19 (NIV)

Results

12

The results?

God forgave... He did not destroy them on the spot.
BUT there were still consequences for their sin.

The Lord replied, "I have **forgiven** them, as you asked. Nevertheless, as surely as I live and as surely as the glory of the Lord fills the whole earth, not one of those who saw my glory and the signs I performed in Egypt and in the wilderness but who disobeyed me and tested me ten times—**not one of them will ever see the land** I promised on oath to their ancestors. No one who has treated me with contempt will ever see it."

Numbers 14:20-23 (NIV)

In the book of Psalms, we read:

... you were to Israel a **forgiving** God, though you **punished their misdeeds**.

Psalms 99:8b (NIV)

This should be a warning to us: NEVER treat sin as a trivial matter!

13

> An **innocent** person interceded...
AND was willing to be punished with the guilty. <

Example: **When Israel made the golden calf.**

GOD SAID: Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them.
Exodus 32:10a (NIV)

MOSES SAID: "Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please **forgive** their sin—**but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.**"
Exodus 32:31b-32 (NIV)

Some were put to death by a plague... **but not all were destroyed at that time.**

In Romans 9:3-4a, Paul says he could wish that he could trade places with Israel, and take *their* eternal punishment. (But he knows it *can't* happen.)

14

④ WE FIND EXAMPLES OF **PEOPLE FORGIVING PEOPLE.**

> **The guilty people asked for forgiveness.** <

Example: **Joseph forgives his brothers.**

(They had greatly wronged Joseph ... and they knew it.)

Their request:

When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge and wants to repay us in full for all the harm we did to him?"

So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave these instructions before he died: 'Tell Joseph this: Please **forgive** the sin of your brothers and the wrong they did when they treated you so badly.'

Now please **forgive** the sin of the servants of the God of your father."

Genesis 50:15-17a (NET)

Results

15

We do not know if their father actually said these things, or if they fabricated it, to try to "attain" forgiveness. Either way, it didn't accomplish anything, because Joseph had **already** forgiven them.

Joseph's response:

When this message was reported to him, Joseph wept. Then his brothers also came and threw themselves down before him; they said, "Here we are; we are your slaves." But Joseph answered them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant to harm me, but God intended it for a good purpose, so he could preserve the lives of many people, as you can see this day. So now, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your little children."

Then he consoled them and spoke kindly to them.

Genesis 50:17b-21 (NET)

Oh that WE would have this attitude when someone sinned against us!

16

Example: **Saul asks Samuel to forgive him.**

- Saul asks **Samuel** to forgive his sin. There is no confession to **God**, or even a request for Samuel to intercede with God.
- Saul's goal is to impress the people – to get their approval. To accomplish this, he asks to be honored by **Samuel** in the presence of the people. He wants to "worship" – but only so that the people will see it.
- The characteristics of true repentance and humility are absent.

Saul answered Samuel, "I have sinned. I have transgressed the LORD's command and your words. Because **I was afraid of the people**, I obeyed them. Now therefore, please **forgive** my sin and **return with me** so I can worship the LORD."

Saul said, "I have sinned. **Please honor me** now before the elders of my people and before Israel. ..."

1 Samuel 15:24-25, 30a (CSB)

17

> An **innocent** person interceded... AND chose to bear the guilt AND kept someone else from sinning! <

Example: **Abigail keeps David from taking revenge on Nabal.**

- Nabal was definitely in the wrong. But David's planned response (revenge) would have also been in the wrong.
- Abigail (Nabal's wife) asked to have Nabal's guilt placed upon *her* – and then she asked for David's forgiveness!

Falling at his feet, she said, "My lord, I accept all the guilt!

Please **forgive** the sin of your servant ...

1 Samuel 25:24a, 28a (NET)

- A short time later, God strikes Nabal dead (by means of a stroke).

In "people-to-people" forgiveness, sins committed against **God** still need to be dealt with.

18

⑤ WE LEARN THAT FORGIVENESS IS EMBEDDED IN THE NEW COVENANT

God told Israel that he would *replace* the original covenant he made with them, *which they constantly broke*, with a new covenant.

- Jesus brought us this covenant, and has made it available to all who are willing to repent and trust him – even non-Jews.

This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the **forgiveness** of sins.

Matthew 26:28 (NIV)

- Forgiveness is just *one* of the features of this covenant – and today, it applies to ALL who repent and trust Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile.

"For I will **forgive** their iniquity and never again remember their sin."

Jeremiah 31:34b (CSB) – quoted in the New Testament.

19

The New Covenant comes with power and changed hearts.

- Under the Old Covenant, the people knew how to live. But that covenant didn't have the power to make them live that way.

For **the law never** made anything perfect. ...
The **law of Moses** was **unable** to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature.

Hebrews 7:19a; Romans 8:3a (NLT)

- Under the New Covenant, the power to do these things is embedded in the hearts of God's people.

See, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a **new covenant** ...
I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts. ...
For I will **forgive** their wrongdoing, and I will never again remember their sins.

Hebrews 8:8b, 10b, 12 (CSB)

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What can we conclude?

⇒ There is much we can learn from the Old Testament.

- There are types of forgiveness that are NOT found in the New Testament – because the New Testament spends more time focusing on the eternal aspect of forgiveness.
- The early church used the Old Testament to learn how to do these things. (Why should the New Testament repeat everything when the Old Testament already says it?)
- Though we live in a different context, these examples illustrate basic principles – which still would apply today.

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⇒ There is a striking contrast between the responses of the saved vs. unsaved.

Even when the unsaved do ask for forgiveness, their motives are self-centered (except for those who are in the process of becoming saved). More often than not, the unsaved just rage against God, rather than asking for "forgiveness."

- **(UNSAVED)** Pharaoh didn't care about the God of Israel... he just wanted the plague removed. Saul's main interest was impressing the people. In each case, once they got what they wanted, they reverted to their old ways.
- **(SAVED)** In both Old and New Testaments, we see abandonment of sin, expressions of restored fellowship with God, and love – even self-sacrificial love – toward other people.

22

We've looked at what Old and New Testaments teach us about forgiveness – today in the O.T., and last time in the N.T.

YOUR MISSION!

We've had an overview of what forgiveness is – God's forgiveness and ours... and the connection between the two.

Evaluate **YOUR** forgiveness.

- ⇒ Has *God's* forgiveness had any effect on the way *you* forgive?
- ⇒ In what ways should the Old and New Testament teachings about forgiveness influence your interaction with others?
- ⇒ Make it your goal to learn about forgiveness, and how these principles might apply in your life – in your attitude and actions.

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Credits

SCRIPTURE

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