

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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“Did God 'Roll Forward' the Sins of Israel?”

Ever since I became a Christian, I have heard it taught that God "rolled forward" the sins of Israel until the time of Christ. Is this true? When God said, "I forgive you," did He mean it? Or did God mean to say, "I forgive you—but only in theory or principle"?

I recently came across this "rolling forward" idea in a well-respected commentary: "...The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin, but only rolled them forward and suspended the condemnation of the law from year to year until Christ came and suffered under the law and to finally take away their sins" (David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles*, vol.3, p.226). But I must ask, "How does this work, exactly?"

- First, people read that "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb.10:4). From this, many have assumed that since animal blood cannot take away sins, therefore no sins were forgiven under that sacrificial system. This is an unjustified leap of reasoning. This is like saying, "It is impossible for my two-year-old child to drive

from Seattle to Boston," and then assume that, because the two-year-old cannot actually do the driving, he never traveled to Boston. This assumes much, but proves little.

- Second, people read that "in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed" until Christ's death on the cross (Rom.3:25). From this, many have assumed that "passing over" these sins means that God did not deal with them immediately or in a legal manner. This rationale, too, is unjustified.

- Third, since Jesus' blood is the ultimate and universal cleansing agent for the human soul, many have concluded that until this blood was shed, no soul could be cleansed of its sins. Does the Bible teach this? Are we sure about this? Are you?

It is true that animal blood served as a type, not the substance, of atonement. The blood of a mere animal cannot remove human sin (Acts 13:38-39). Everything in the Law of Moses—including the Law itself—served as a "shadow" or sign of what was to come (Heb.10:1). The fact that the Law (or "law") could not atone for sins once and for all indicates that it was insufficient for what was actually needed. This does not mean God gave Israel an incomplete or defective law; it was ideal for the purpose it served (Rom.7:7-13). But everything in the Law pointed forward to a perfect, complete, "once for all" sacrifice that would never be duplicated or superseded.

Thus, the "blood of bulls and goats" served as a type of what was to come. Yet because God knew with certainty what was to come, He could forgive people even before this "once for all" sacrifice had been offered. At least ten times in Leviticus (4:20, 26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13, 16, 18; 6:7; and 19:22) it declares that the priest, upon receiving a proper sin

offering, was to pronounce the one who presented the offering "forgiven." Did God just pretend to forgive sins at that time? Did He roll their sins forward? Absolutely not. He did exactly what He declared would be done: He forgave the sinner of his sins.

This forgiveness was contingent upon what was to come; this fact is not disputed. Yet since it was God (in Christ) who would perform the deed required, the deed was as good as done. Thus, David was forgiven by God (2 Sam.12:13; Psalms 25:18; 32; 51; and others). David wrote by inspiration, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us" (103:12). Think of the several times that Jesus pronounced, "Your sins are forgiven"—and remember that He (and they) were all under the Law of Moses. In all of these cases, sins are never said to be "rolled forward," but are indeed forgiven.

If we teach that God did not forgive anyone until Christ's crucifixion, we inadvertently call into question these Old Testament Scriptures, and doubt (or do not understand) the absolute surety in which God's promises are made. The fact that God made these promises (of forgiveness) demonstrates that He knew long before it ever happened that His Son would not fail in His mission. Otherwise, we imply that God could not forgive sins until He knew for certain that His Son would succeed in His mission as our Redeemer. Imagine: God waiting to see if His Son would fail!

On the contrary, God's promises are fulfilled in the historical event of the cross, but the cross is founded upon the infallible work of God Himself. The Father knew His Son would not fail; He knew Christ would be the world's sin offering (1 John 2:2). Because of this, He also knew that He could pronounce absolute forgiveness to those who called upon His name centuries before this ever happened.

We cannot have it both ways. We cannot say, "God forgave them" and at the same time "God rolled their sins forward." The one statement contradicts the other. Furthermore, the "rolling forward" concept leads to serious implications: If Israelites died in their sins (since their sins were "rolled forward" and not truly forgiven on the spot), what was the disposition of their souls until the time of Christ? Were they in torment—but after the cross, they were led into glory? Were they in some spiritual limbo until Christ's blood was shed? Could God bring them into Paradise without having truly forgiven them—and if so, how does this impact our understanding of divine forgiveness and "no partiality"? In any case, we end up hammering a round peg into a square hole: it just does not work.

The "rolled forward" concept makes unwarranted leaps in our teaching on God, His infallibility, and forgiveness. While promoted with good intentions, it actually contradicts what God prophesied long ago: "He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth'" (Isa.49:6). In light of His absolute confidence in His Son, God did not roll men's sins forward until the cross, but forgave them entirely.

— Chad Sychtysz, in *Biblical Insights*, August, 2011

The Lord Is My Helper

A little girl, when asked to repeat the 23rd Psalm, said, "The Lord is my shepherd, that's all I want." She may have been a little confused about the actual wording, but she expressed a truth that should be the property of every Christian.

There is no blessing so valuable as the ability to lean upon the sufficiency of God, to find in Him all that we want. The firm basis of such trust was brought to Paul's attention when the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 11:9).

Consider the unsearchable riches which one possesses when the Lord is his helper.

1. There is a feeling of security that transcends social and financial security. The child of God can be content in all circumstances of life. "I have learned in whatsoever state I am, therein to be content." (Phil. 4:11).
2. There is a peace that passeth understanding (Phil. 4:7) and floods the Christian's life with joy that is unspeakable. (I Pet. 1:8). This peace is greater than all the treasures earth can yield.
3. There is a freedom from fear of all types. "So that with good courage we say, The Lord is my helper; I will not fear: What shall man do unto me?" (Heb. 13:6). Fear of bodily harm and even of death itself is dissipated when we walk with the Lord. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me:" (Ps. 23:4)

4. There is a crown of life that glitters through eternity. "Henceforth there is laid tip for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give to me at that day; and not to me only, but also to all them that have loved his appearing." (II TIM. 4:8).

In addition to these wonderful blessings, the Lord promises us what we need physically. Surely, when the Lord is our helper, there can be no want.

- Billy Boyd

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *"The Persecution of Jesus!"* (text: John 15:18-25); Sunday evening: *Bi-monthly Singing!*