

## Who is God? 3: The Saviour

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When I was nursing in the early 1960's there was a series of jokes going round which began What's the difference between.....?

One which was particularly popular amongst the junior medical staff in the hospital where I worked was this.

What's the difference between God and a senior consultant?

Answer: God knows He's not a Senior consultant.

Today we continue our series on Who is God?

Two weeks ago The Rector talked about God as Creator and last week God as King and Judge.

As the story of the Hebrew people is told in the Old Testament, we see their perception of God develop as He reveals Himself to them.

The concept of God as creator, supreme over all he has created moves on and as they encounter Kingship in other nations and get a king of their own so God is perceived as a Sovereign King over his people Israel. At the time of the Judges the concept of God as Righteous judge emerges.

Through all this the promise to Abraham, with the liberation from Egypt under Moses' leadership, God's guidance and sustaining through the wilderness wanderings, the covenant with David, and many other events bear witness to His presence among his people.

Throughout the long history of the Hebrew people God's Hesed (His steadfast love) runs like a golden thread.

The idea of God as the Saviour of His people occurs frequently throughout the Hebrew narrative. The prophet Isaiah proclaims of Him "There is no other God beside me, a just God and Saviour" Is 45 v 21 On numerous occasions God rescues Israel from oppression and their enemies.

As the story unfolds the reader becomes more and more aware that God is a righteous God, and humankind has fallen short of all that He created them to be. Time and again we are told the Israelites turn away from God and time and again God draws them back to Himself and saves them from the results of their rebellion.

Over a period of time ritual sacrifice for the atonement of sin became the practice. Exodus Ch 29 tells us that twice a day a lamb was sacrificed for the sins of the people. Later in Leviticus we read "The priest shall make atonement for the sins you have committed, and you shall be forgiven. The blood of the animal was offered for the death which the sinner deserved. I ought to say just a brief sentence or two about the word Atonement. In the simplest terms it can be described as means of reconciliation. An act by which God restores the relationship between himself and mankind. The atonement is the "At-one-ment" of God and man.

The Jewish law required the sacrifice to be free of defects, and the sinner to be aware of his need for forgiveness. The person identified with the sacrificial victim by putting his hand on its head before it was slaughtered.

In addition to the daily sacrifice a special day was set apart once a year, called the day of atonement. On this day the priest having washed and put on special clothes sacrificed a bullock and sprinkled the blood on the altar. Then the priest took a live goat and released it into the wilderness as a sign to the people that they were freed from their sins through the sacrifice. It was called a scapegoat.

The most significant event in Israel's history was the Exodus. It was the turning point in the history of the Hebrew people, the moment when they identified with being a nation.

God had called Moses to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt but Pharaoh wouldn't let them go.

The Israelites were told to sacrifice a lamb and put its blood on their door posts as a signal to God to pass over their houses when he destroyed all the first born in Egypt. Those who obeyed God's commands were spared and they left the country in great haste.

However, as they got to the Red Sea, they discovered the Egyptians to be in hot pursuit. But God parted the Red Sea and the Hebrew people passed safely to the other side.

Delivered from bondage, freed from slavery, they journeyed through the wilderness. A nation, who were God's own people on the way to the land that God had promised to their ancestor Abraham.

They actually spent 40 years in the wilderness on the way there but that's another story. During their time in the wilderness God gave them laws and made a fresh covenant with them.

There were times when they rebelled against God and turned to worship idols, but the golden thread of God's steadfast love and faithfulness runs unbroken through the story.

Since the time of the Exodus, each year the Passover is commemorated. The Passover meal is eaten with unleavened bread, remembering that they ate in haste. A blessing is said, and the bread broken and shared. Then, and still now the youngest member present asks the Father of the family "Why are we doing this?", and the story is told. The story of their redemption from Egypt, of God's saving power and His steadfast love and faithfulness. It isn't just a rekindling of a memory, each member round the table identifies in the present, with the events of the past.

But the story moves on for the ultimate revelation of God was still to come.

Our understanding is determined by what we know and the thing we know about best is being human. Fellow human-beings are what we can relate to.

In the incarnation God was revealed to us in terms we could understand.

God's ultimate revelation of himself came in the form of a tiny baby

John's account of the crucifixion places Christ's death at the very moment when the Passover lambs are being slain in the Temple. Here is the Lamb of God being put to death for the sins of the whole world.

In this moment we see the full extent of God's love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" John 3 v 16.

George Appleton said this "Your response, dear Lord, to my plea of guilt, is not to tell that I'm not, but to declare me forgiven, to set me free to make a fresh start, to direct my eyes not to the failures of the past but to the grace of the future."

At a specific moment in time the eternal creator of all things became one with his creation. So that through His saving grace, damaged fallen humanity might be restored to a right relationship with Him who is creator, king and judge.

God our Saviour.