

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY AND REVELATION

Type and antitype

The NT church has much to learn from what happened to the OT church, Israel. We might speak of type (týpos) and antitype (antitypos). When the apostle Paul in 1 Cor. wants to teach and guide the Christians in Corinth, he uses the OT history and revelation. There the Christian congregation finds instruction, consolation, admonition and warning. He designates the events during the wandering in the wilderness "as examples for us" (týpoi) "to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did" (10:6). What occurred to the Israelites had a typical character: "These things happened to them as an example (typikōs) and they were written for our instruction" (10:11). Thus the apostle also stresses in Rom.15:4 that "whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope".

The OT revelation contains many types of Christ's atonement. We may e.g. think of Israel's ceremonial law and the sacrificial service, which the NT designates as "a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ" (Col.2:17). We may also think of the Messianic prophecies. But in this paper we will limit ourselves to typical features in the OT church and its relationship to God and His words. The material is very rich, so we cannot go into details. Because of lack of time we also have to pass by such important events as the fall (Gen.3), the judgment of the flood (Gen.6-9), the call of Abram and the promise to him (Gen.12-22), the exodus out of Egypt and the establishment of the old covenant (Ex.1-24) etc.

I.

THE OT CHURCH WAS CHOSEN TO BE GOD'S PEOPLE BY GRACE ALONE

"The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were fewest of all peoples, but because the Lord loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the Lord brought you out by a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Deut.7:7,8). "It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land" (Deut.9:5).

Israel's whole existence depends upon God, His mighty deeds. The same is true of the NT church. In both cases the church is totally dependent upon God for its existence and maintenance. Sola gratia is in all times the basis for the church. Without God, His grace and help, Israel cannot remain His people. If therefore Israel cuts off the fellowship with God, it cuts off the basis for its existence. If the people do not recognize and use what God has done for them and freely given to them, they become lost, they deprive themselves of God's blessing and salvation. The unbelief brings about a curse (Lev.26, Deut. 28).

Therefore it is vital for the church to listen to the voice of the Lord

To believe in the Lord or to listen to His voice is the necessary context for the sacrificial laws. In the day when God brought the Israelites out of Egypt, He did not speak concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But He asked for faith, for listening to His voice (Jer.7:22f). "Now then, if you will indeed listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex.19:5f). "Listen, that your soul may live" (Isa.55:3).

Old Testament history

God's people is a believing people, which is thankful to God and praises Him for His marvelous deeds and mercy, which says yea and amen to His words, both when He punishes and when He absolves.

The OT service was not instituted in order that the church might give something good to God, to make Him gracious through prayers and gifts. It was instituted as a means of grace. God wanted to give His church His grace, to serve and bless it. Out of Israel's temple streams of blessings and life flowed. God cleansed Israel from all its sins. And God expected that the people would listen and receive, that they would rejoice in their hearts at His grace and blessing, that they would praise Him and give Him true thanksgiving.

The teaching of Moses and the prophets were synonymous with the voice of the Lord, because they spoke on behalf of God and at His commission. The prophet is God's mouth. False prophets, on the other hand, "prophesy from their own heart" (Ez.13:2).

The teaching of God must not be changed: "You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it" (Deut.4:2). "Whatever I command you, you shall be careful to do; you shall not add nor take away from it" (Deut.12:32). "For it is not an idle word for you; indeed it is your life" (Deut.32:47). The Lord said to Joshua: "Be careful to do according to all the teaching which Moses My servant gave you" (Josh.1:7).

Accordingly, foreign doctrines and foreign worship cannot be tolerated in the church. The fundamental rule reads: "You shall purge the evil from among you" (Deut.13:5, 17:7). The OT church was a unique theocracy, an outward kingdom, to which the means of grace were tied. The spiritual and political kingdom were united in one and the same kingdom. The NT church, on the other hand, is not a political kingdom but only a spiritual. Therefore, church discipline in the NT church is not combined with political violence as in the OT (cf 1 Cor. 5) and the means of grace are not tied to a state or an outward church organization.

As the false prophet has to be placed outside the church, he had during the old covenant to be placed outside the land, outside the state, to be killed. In this connection the firm words about the Canaanites are to be understood, as well as the words about Babylon and its little ones (Ps.137).

Therefore false doctrine is a curse

As the blessing has its basis in the Lord and His word, the church risks the blessing through departing from Him. The relationship to the Lord has to do with life and death, blessing or curse (Deut.30:15ff). When a man exchanges the word of God for false doctrine, he draws down upon himself a curse. Only the promises of God are lifegiving and bring salvation. "Our help is in the name of the Lord" (Ps.124:8).

What a curse it is, when a people is offered human ideas instead of God's word, stones instead of bread, when a people which needs to be healed from its injury by the Lord, is misled by false prophets saying: "Peace, when there is no peace" (Ez.13:10). The breaches in the wall of the vineyard are plastered over with whitewash, so that nobody may see the truth: that the vineyard of the Lord may be ruined at any time. Concerning false shepherds and their flock the Lord says: "All their flock is scattered" (Jer.10:21). "You have caused many to stumble by the instruction (Mal.2:8).

Thus the false doctrine leads to blindness and hardening, more and more repugnance toward the words of the Lord. "This is a rebellious people, false sons, sons who refuse to listen to the instruction of the Lord; who say to the seers, 'You must not prophesy to us what is right, speak to us pleasant words'" (Isa.30:9f). "I have spread out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,

who walk in the way which is not good, following their own thoughts" (Isa. 65:2).

The Lord had given Israel clear information about what would happen, if it did not listen to the voice of the Lord. What happened, when Eve listened to the snake and his words: "Indeed, has God said?" (Gen.3:1)? What happened when all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth" (Gen.6:12)? What happened when the people at Sinai made for themselves a molten calf (Ex.32:25-29)? What happened when ten out of twelve spies seduced the people not to trust the promises of God (Num.14:21-45)? Unbelief toward the Lord had always resulted in unhappiness.

God had also clearly prophesied what would come to pass in the future, if future generations will not listen to the voice of the Lord: "It shall come about if you ever forget the Lord your God, and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you shall surely perish. Like the nations that the Lord makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because you would not listen to the voice of the Lord your God" (Deut.8:19f). "The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, ... it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground (cf. Isa.1:7) until you are destroyed... Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as the stars of heaven for multitude, because you did not listen to the voice of the Lord your God... the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth" (Deut.28:49-64).

The possession of the land is impossible without the Lord and His deeds. The people loses the promised land by turning their backs toward the Lord and His mighty acts, by not accepting in faith what He has done and has freely given to His people. Thus the returning to the land is closely connected with the returning to the Lord and all His words.

Therefore unionism is a curse

A main thread through the whole OT is the curse of unionism. God has through Moses seriously warned against this curse: "You shall not intermarry with them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor shall you take their daughters for your sons. For they will turn your sons away from following Me to serve other gods; then the anger of the Lord will be kindled against you, and He will quickly destroy you" (Deut.7:3f). "You shall utterly destroy them, the Hittite and the Amorite, the Canaanite and the Perizzite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, as the Lord your God has commanded you, in order that they may not teach you to do according to all their detestable things which they have done for their gods, so that you would sin against the Lord your God" (Deut.20:17f).

In his farewell speech Joshua said: "Be very firm, then, to keep and do all that is written in the book of the law of Moses, so that you may not turn aside from it to the right hand or to the left, in order that you may not associate with these nations, these which remain among you, or mention the name of their gods, or make anyone swear by them, or serve them, or bow down to them" (Josh. 23:6f).

It was false doctrine and unionism which led to the fall of the OT church. It tolerated foreign worship in its midst. This became the cause of the split into Israel and Judah after Solomon's death (931 B.C.). And when Israel perishes in 722, it is said: "Now this came about, because the sons of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God, ... they had feared other gods and walked in the customs of the nations whom the Lord had driven out before the sons of Israel... Yet the Lord warned Israel and Judah, through all His prophets and every seer, saying, 'Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments... However, they did not listen, but stiffened their neck like their fathers, who did not believe

in the Lord their God... And the sons of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not depart from them, until the Lord removed Israel from His sight, as He spoke through all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away into exile from their own land to Assyria until this day" (2 Ki.17:7ff). "Also Judah did not keep the commandments of the Lord their God, but walked in the customs which Israel had introduced" (2 Ki.17:19), and therefore the judgment also came over Judah and Jerusalem a little more than 100 years later (605, 597 and 587). "Only a remnant within them will return; a destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness" (Isa.10:22, cf. Dan.9:26f). Only a remnant will be saved, will truly rely on the Lord. This remnant, this stump is the holy seed (Isa.6:13), to whom all who truly rely on the Lord belong by grace alone.

II.

"THESE THINGS OCCURRED AS TYPES." A FEW EXAMPLES

The great tribulation under Pharaoh

God's enemies (the world) always want to engulf or destroy the true church. This was also the case with the head of the house of slavery, Pharaoh. Yet he was not able with all his cunning and power to destroy God's people. On the contrary, "the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out" (Ex.1:12).

This beginning of the OT church, the Israelite state, is typical. When a church is born or grows up in a place, it very often immediately will encounter lots of hardship and opposition (often from closely related groups, "Samaritans"). The tribulation under Pharaoh teaches us that the church of God is a foreigner on the earth and has the whole world against it. The world is a most bitter enemy to God and thus an enemy to the church. This the church never ought to forget. The church digs its own grave, when it tries to win the friendship of the world. Cross and suffering never hurt the church but work for the good of those who love him (Rom.8:28), for their growth and extension. Another proof for this is the great tribulation and persecution against the church at Jerusalem. "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went" (Acts 8:4). Cf. Dan.9:25 about the start of the NT church: "even in times of distress."

The golden calf

While Moses was on the holy mountain and received the law of the Lord, we find the holy and priestly kingdom singing and dancing around a molten calf, representing the Lord. This event teaches us how malicious and unstable the human heart is, also the heart of a Christian. It is still filled with thorns and thistles. Rather easily it allows itself to be seduced, especially when the leaders of the church neglect the discipline of the Word and give full rein to the lusts and desires of human nature. The account of the molten calf is a serious warning also to us, to the orthodox church. Just to possess the true Word and Sacraments is no guarantee that a Christian congregation or church never does what is destructive to it.

This example from the earliest history of Israel teaches us also how it is possible to stop an occurred damage, before it will become chronic. The anger of the Lord is kindled against the idolatry of His people. God wants to destroy it and in its place make Moses a great nation. And Moses did not excuse the sin but let the people understand that it had broken its fellowship with God and now was outside the covenant under wrath. As a token of the broken covenant he crushed the tables of the law. Furthermore he burnt the molten calf

and ground it to powder and scattered it over the surface of the water and made the sons of Israel drink it as a token that they had to bear their sin with all its consequences. They also got to know the seriousness of the sin, for as a punishment God let death come upon 3000 men. Finally Moses moved his tent outside the camp, because God had broken fellowship with His people. There, outside the camp, he and God had fellowship. They had broken fellowship with the idolatrous people, that is, used the binding key. And see, this preaching of the law in words and deeds worked. The people now repented and turned to God's grace. And God is abounding in loving-kindness. He had mercy on His people and forgave it. He sent the angel of the covenant to lead the people and protect it from God's wrath.

Thus the ministers of the Word always have to use the law against the idolaters and separate from their camp, use the binding key and with words and deeds show them, that their sin breaks the covenant. By the grace of God this church discipline will be effective and for penitent sinners the gospel is sweet, namely that God is "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; who keeps loving-kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin" (Ex.34:6f).

The rebellion of Korah and his company

Korah, Dathan and Abiram together with 250 leaders of the congregation, men of renown, assembled together against Moses and Aaron, men called by God as leaders of the church. They mocked at their ministry and their leadership. They delivered serious but false accusations against them (Num.16).

Now and then false teachers or proud spirits appear in the Christian church and want to establish themselves as leaders. They oppose the public ministry.

This time the rebellious group did not succeed in winning over the congregation to its side. At the request of Moses and Aaron the rest of the congregation separated from these false members and this became its rescue. Thus even today it is God's serious will that the Christians separate from members who revolt against God and His called servants.

Achan's unfaithful action

Achan acted unfaithfully in regard to the things under the ban (Josh.7). Because of this the anger of the Lord burned against the sons of Israel, not only against Achan. God withdrew his help from the Israelites in their struggle. Israel had conquered the great city of Jericho, but it could not capture the small city of Ai. The Lord said to Joshua: "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. And they have even taken some of the things under the ban and have both stolen and deceived" (v.11). The crime of Achan was counted as a crime of the whole church, as long as the church did not take actions against Achan.

Also this event contains instruction and admonition for the whole Christian church. When a Christian congregation or church teaches correctly but at the same time tolerates that one or two members depart from God's word, the whole congregation is guilty. God holds the whole congregation or church responsible for what every single member does and it loses the blessing, if the sin is tolerated.

Let us mention another example which shows that the whole congregation or church is responsible for the sins of single members. In Judg.19-21 we are told about a terrible crime committed by some Benjaminites in Gibeah. This crime was ascribed to the whole Israel. And when the tribe of Benjamin defended the sinners, the whole tribe had to be punished. Therefore the eleven

tribes as a true church had to discipline the tribe of Benjamin, and this meant blessing for the whole church and for the rest among the Benjaminites who humbled themselves under God's hand.

A true church does not rest before the public sin is punished and removed and its Christian standing is restored before God and man.

"All the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders" (Josh.24:31)

Still a long time after the conquest of Canaan Israel faithfully served the Lord. This happy situation prevailed "all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel" (Judg.2:7).

This is a good example of the blessing of true leaders and teachers. Joshua's and the elders' trust in God and listening to His words during their hard struggles brought these good fruits. Those are blessed times for a Christian church, when God's word really is allowed to reign and God's people walks in faith and fear before God. To look at and meditate on God's marvelous deeds brings good fruits. Blessing usually follows after difficult times of testing and struggles, if the church has remained faithful during its tribulation. But if the church tries to avoid the necessary struggles and is unfaithful, the result will be a falling away from the true faith.

When Christians stop fighting against the devil, the world and their own flesh, they will be conquered by the world. The friendship of the world leads to the ruin of the church.

The time of the Judges

The apostasy during the time of the Judges did not yet lead to hardening and blindness. When the church came into great distress through God's punishment, they turned again to God, and He had mercy upon them and raised great leaders for them. God does not at once remove His hand from His people. He gives the disobedient opportunity for repentance. When the people turn to Him for help and mercy and repent of their sins, He is near and offers them His forgiveness and His help.

Samuel

The prophetic ministry of Samuel resulted in a reformation of the whole church. In times of great apostasy and distress Samuel went from place to place and judged Israel after the law of God. He founded several prophetic schools and his trained disciples went off into the country and spread the regenerating seed. And it worked. A general repentance was effected as the result of the patient work of the prophets. Through His Spirit and His Word God works faith, where and when it pleases Him (CA V).

Jeroboam I

The kingdom of Jeroboam I came to use the name "Israel", although his kingdom is a type of the false church. A false church is always eager to be regarded as a true church. It is characteristic of a false church to erect a man-made service and to let human ideas take the place of the true doctrine.

The false church under Jeroboam had a disastrous influence on both Israel and Judah. A few examples: The mighty king Omri: "He walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and in his sins which he made Israel sin, provoking the Lord God of Israel with their idols" (1 Ki.16:26). King Jehu, who intervened against the Baal cult in Israel: "However, as for the sins of Jeroboam

the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin, from these Jehu did not depart" (2 Ki.10:20). The same is said about Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, Zachariah, Menahem and Pekah.

The welfare of Israel and Judah and the hardening of the OT church

During the first half of the 8th century B.C. the two kingdoms or churches experienced a political and economic upswing. But this external prosperity did not bring about a new thankfulness toward God but instead increased the apostasy. It is true that they offered more sacrifices than ever before and performed a rich liturgy, but had God asked for sacrifices without listening to God's voice and prayers without faith and obedience (Isa.1:10-15, Am.5)? Their piety was simulated in order to hide their evil deeds and unfaithfulness. Their moral decay went hand in hand with a strong eagerness to have a rich worship as an opus operatum, a guarantee that they were the chosen people and had nothing to fear. But Amos told them: "Will not the day of the Lord be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it? I hate, I reject your festivals, nor do I delight in your solemn assemblies... Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps" (5:20ff).

Now God determined to punish the people, not only through the neighboring peoples but through a ruthless nation far off, Assur. The people had to be reminded that the possession of the land in peace was dependent on the Lord and His grace. Thus God also raised many prophets to instruct the people and discipline them. This last era of the two kingdoms became the main period of OT prophecy. The prophets showed Israel and Judah their sins and hit them with the rod of the Word. They also reminded them of God's former deeds for His people and referred to the coming Savior in order to soften their hearts. In these dark days the messianic prophecies shone clearer than ever before.

But Israel and Judah did not see and hear. "Thou hast smitten them, but they did not weaken; Thou hast consumed them, but they refused to take correction. They have made their faces harder than rocks; they have refused to repent" (Jer.5:3). "Since the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt until this day, I have sent you all My servants the prophets, daily rising early and sending them. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck; they did evil more than their fathers" (Jer. 7:25f).

When God through the promise of the coming Redeemer wanted to save His people from their deadly injuries, a terrible apostasy became a reality: the OT church rejected the grace of God, did not want to be saved by God. And thus the apostasy reached the worst and the unchangeable stage, the hardening. God departed definitely from the OT church in general, not from a remnant in it, the true church. He remained with a remnant, out of which He would build His NT church. The prophets now received the difficult command from God to harden the OT church (Isa.6:9ff): "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and repent and be healed" (v.10). The prophets now had to tell the Israelites: "They will fall and not rise again" (Amos 8:14). "The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer" (Amos 8:2). "Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob" (Amos 9:8).

The greater part of so called Christendom is under the judgment of hardening, is abandoned by God and has nothing else to expect than wrath and eternal judgment. All Christians and all congregations, which still have a

sensorium for God's word and deeds, ought to listen to the warnings from what happened to the OT church. It is a terrible thing, when a Christian church consciously opposes a Biblical doctrine. The result then may be, that a Christian becomes totally unable to understand God's Word, to see and hear, and thereby he cuts himself off from the way of repentance and salvation. Thus it may happen with a Christian church or congregation, that the Lord will come and remove the lampstand from its midst (cf. Rev.2:5).

The holy remnant, the true Israel

There was during Israel's and Judah's last evil time and down to the final catastrophe for the OT church (70 A.D.) a remnant, which held to the Word of God, sat at the feet of the prophets and consoled itself with the promised Redeemer. This remnant received the consolation of Israel, when Christ came and fulfilled the promises. In this true church all will be incorporated, who believe in Christ. This true church sings as Simeon: "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel" (Luke 2:30ff).

It is still God's plan of salvation to create a holy people for Himself, a kingdom of priests, through the gospel. Therefore the true Israel is eager to go and make disciples of all nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you". It is still God's plan of salvation that without Him and His Word this people cannot exist. By grace alone they are saved. The Biblical history and revelation make this clear to us.

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5th World Seminary Conference.
El Paso, Texas
March 27-31, 1978