**Forgiveness In The Old Testament**

The Old Testament saints were actually forgiven of their sins when they met the required conditions. It is not just that their sins were “rolled forward” as some Christians teach. Let’s notice some passages that actually say this outright …

Psalms 32:1,5 “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered … I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.” Notice the text says the writer was forgiven - past tense, not just that he would be forgiven when Jesus died on the cross.

When Nathan confronted David with his sin with Bathsheba and against Uriah, David replied “I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” Again, David’s sin was “put away” past tense. God put away his sin at that time, not centuries later at the moment Jesus died on the cross.

Read Lev 4:20,26,31,35,5:10,13,16,18 in the two Old Testament chapters about sins of ignorance. Notice eight times the sense is that when the sacrifice is offered, the sin is forgiven. We see the same in Lev 6:7, 19:22, Num 15:25, 26, 28, 30:5, 8, and 12.

And notice how Num 14:19 reads - “Pardon, I beseech thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of thy mercy, and as thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now.” Past tense forgiveness again, right?

All of the following verses have forgiveness in the past tense, not future (i.e., just rolled forward):

* Psalms 78:38 “But he, being full of compassion, forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not: yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath.”
* Psalms 85:2 “Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin.”
* Psalms 99:8 “Thou answeredst them, O Lord our God: thou wast a God that forgavest them, though thou tookest vengeance of their inventions”

Mark 1:4 says John’s baptism was “for the remission of sins” just like Acts 2:38. You mean John’s baptism didn’t really (actually) lead to the remission of sins? Then how do we know Acts 2:38 really does?

There are in fact dozens of passages that teach people actually received forgiveness in Old Testament times. So why doesn’t everybody agree? Let’s examine some of the objections …

Some point out “it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4), and that is true. But I am not saying the animal sacrifices took away the sin back then, but that the blood of Christ did it. Heb 9:15 points this fact out – “And for this cause he (Jesus) is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” Likewise the very point of the similar Rom 3:24-26 is that sins were forgiven in the Old Testament, and that the death of Christ justified God in doing that – back then. Here is that passage from the KJV – “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” So God forgave sin in the past and the death of Jesus declared God righteous in doing so.

Some object that “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb 9:22) and Jesus had not shed his blood yet. But the verse uses the word “without” not “until.” It does not say “until the shedding of blood is no remission.” See the difference? If we buy our groceries on credit, we pay later, but we eat the groceries now. When Rev 13:8 says Jesus was “slain from the foundation of the world,” it doesn’t mean Jesus actually died before man was created, but it means it was “as good as done.” If Jesus’ death was as good as done, then God could certainly have forgiven sins in Old Testament times based upon that death. As we pointed out earlier, that’s what Rom 3:24-26 is saying.

It is true remembrance for sins were made every year (Heb 10:3), but there is a difference in forgiveness and “forgetness.” My wife has forgiven me many times, but she didn’t always forget immediately. Under the old covenant God forgave but didn’t always forget. That is one of the things that makes the new covenant better than the old; now God not only forgives, but forgets (Heb 8:12).

One last question – if God didn’t actually forgive Old Testament saints of their sins, that would mean they went to the grave unjustified, and what then would Rev 14:13 (“Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord”) say about their eternal destiny?