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Volume 3 – 2011

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**Is Divine Grace Really Beyond Human Comprehension?  
An Old Testament Perspective**

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***Abstract:** This article addresses the question of divine grace and human understanding. The article seeks to find out from the Old Testament perspective whether divine grace is really beyond human comprehension. Gleaning from the use of grace in the New Testament and its usages in the Old Testament, the article delves into the question of grace and how it is used and understood in the Old Testament perspective. After a careful analysis of instances where grace is shown in the Old Testament and how it is shown, the paper concludes that divine grace is within human comprehension only to the extent that they know and understand God and His operations. Thus, humans can understand the concept of divine grace in proportion to the rate at which they know God and how He operates. So long as humans have a limited knowledge of God, they will have limited understanding of his grace.*

*Key Words:* Divine grace, Human limitedness, Old Testament, Chen, Charis, Salvation

**Introduction**

Grace is a key word used among most Christians of today. According to James Hastings, “Christianity first made grace a leading

term in the vocabulary of religion.”<sup>1</sup> Many people see their lives as an evidence of grace. Each time grace is mentioned, Christians actually have in mind divine grace. Grace is viewed as “a favourable disposition on the part of God, usually without reference to any merit or desert in the object of the favour... even when the object is entirely lacking in merit or desert.”<sup>2</sup> Hastings sees grace as “God’s unmerited, unconstrained love toward sinners, revealed and operative in Christ.”<sup>3</sup> It is also defined theologically as God’s free and spontaneous action that is taken to meet the needs of humans, especially in the provision of salvation and enabling the believer.<sup>4</sup> Because grace is viewed as an act of God, the average Christian will attribute every miracle to the grace of God. Divine grace has lots of perspective views and how people look at it. Much has been written on the concept of grace by scholars and Theologians. Mostly, the concept of grace is understood in the context of New Testament teachings. This is probably because the writers of the New Testament use the word more often and they present it more explicitly in their writings.

Since grace is always perceived as a divine element, the understanding of grace always takes the individual to the attributes of God. Whereas much scholarly work has been done regarding the concept of grace in the New Testament, there seems to be little on the concept in the Old Testament. From the Old Testament perspective, it seems like many Bible readers conclude without a comprehensive analysis that divine grace is beyond human comprehension. This notion, however, has not yet received much scrutiny in Old Testament Scholarship. This paper seeks to look at the question of whether divine grace is really beyond human comprehension from the Old Testament perspective. The paper gives a review of the concept of

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<sup>1</sup> James Hastings, *Hasting’s Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), p. 313.

<sup>2</sup> Madeleine S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, *Harper’s Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 236. Miller and Miller also view the Grace of God as a quality of his nature which is the source of men’s undeserved blessings, especially when these undeserved blessings have to do with their salvation from sin.

<sup>3</sup> Hastings, 313; See also Andrew H. Trotter, “Grace” in Walter A. Elwell, (ed.), *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), p. 312; Also see William Evans, *The Great Doctrines of the Bible*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), pp. 158, 159.

<sup>4</sup> Fleming H. Revell, *The Revell Bible Dictionary*, (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1990), p. 450.

grace in the New Testament and proceeds to look at how it is perceived and expressed in the Old Testament.

## **I. Grace in the New Testament**

### **A. The usages of “grace” in the New Testament**

There is a rampant usage and exposition of grace in the New Testament. Jesus is presented in the New Testament as the bearer of God’s grace (cf. Luke 2:40; John 1:14; 1:17; Acts 15:11; Romans 1:5; 3:24; 1 Corinthians 1:4). There is also the constant use of the expression “the grace of Jesus Christ” making Jesus the possessor of grace (cf. Acts 15:11; Romans 16:20, 24; 1 Corinthians 16:23; 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8:9; 13:14; Galatians 6:18; Philippians 4:23; 1 Thesalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18; 2 Peter 3:18; Revelation 22:21). Thus, he is presented both as the bearer and possessor of grace. The epistles of Paul and several other passages in the New Testament have a lot to say about grace. In the epistles of Paul, grace appears as the opening greeting and the last in his farewell. Generally, he views grace as a blessing of God that comes through Christ.<sup>5</sup> In Paul’s theology, grace supplies “the one and sufficient means of deliverance from sin, holding objectively the place which faith holds subjectively in man’s salvation.”<sup>6</sup> In most of the New Testament references, grace is understood as an element of divinity. Hence one will often read phrases like “grace of God” (Luke 2:40; Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; Romans 5:15; 1 Cor. 1:4; 3:10; 15:10; Gal. 2:21; Eph. 3:2; Col. 1:6; Titus 2:11; Heb. 2:9; 1 Pet. 4:10; 5:12; Jude 1:4) and other statements that link grace with God.

### **B. The Meaning of “Charis”**

The use of the word “grace” in the New Testament is a translation from the Greek *charis*. This word appears over 170 times in the Greek text.<sup>7</sup> When used, *charis* represents a quality that adds delight or pleasure, a favourable attitude. It is also described as an experience or state resulting from God’s favour, as verbal thanks

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<sup>5</sup> Hastings, 313.

<sup>6</sup> Hastings, 314.

<sup>7</sup> Burton Scott Easton, Easton Bible Dictionary (electronic edition).

offering rendered to God.<sup>8</sup> Objectively, *charis* may denote the impression produced by “gracefulness,” as expressed in 3<sup>rd</sup> John 1:4 where many manuscripts read *chara*, “joy”<sup>9</sup> These various meanings naturally tend to blend into each other, and in certain cases it is difficult to fix the precise meaning that the writer meant the word to convey, a confusion that is common to both New Testament and secular Greek And in secular Greek the word has a still larger variety of meanings that scarcely concern theologians. Despite this variety of interpretations, the prominent meaning of *charis* in the New Testament is “favor”.<sup>10</sup> It is summed up in God’s provision of salvation when we deserve His wrath.<sup>11</sup>

In the Gospels, *charis* is used in the words of Christ only in Luke 6:32-34; 17:9. As Christ spoke in Aramaic, the choice of this word is due to Luke, probably under the influence of its common Christian use in his own day. And there is no word in Jesus’ recorded sayings that suggests that He employed habitually any especial term to denote grace in any of its senses. But the ideas are unambiguously present. That the pardon of sins is a free act on God’s part may be described as

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<sup>8</sup> W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), p. 277. Easton explains that In secular Greek of all periods it is also a very common word, and in both Biblical and secular Greek it is used with far more meanings than can be represented by any one term in English Primarily the word seems to denote pleasant external appearance, “gracefulness” “loveliness”

<sup>9</sup> *Charis* may be translated by “graciousness,” or, when directed toward a particular person or persons, by “favor.” So in Luke 2:52, “Jesus advanced .... in favor with God and men.” As the complement to this, *charis* denotes the emotion awakened in the recipient of such favor, i.e. “gratitude.” So Luke 17:9 reads literally, ‘Has he gratitude to that servant?’ In a slightly transferred sense *charis* designates the words or emotion in which gratitude is expressed, and so becomes “thanks.” Concretely, *charis* may mean the act by which graciousness is expressed, as in 1 Cor 16:3, where the King James Version translates by “liberality” and the Revised Version (British and American) by “bounty.” The writers of the New Testament inherited the important key concept of “grace” from the Old Testament. This concept anchors the New Testament message in salvation history.

Also, according to Dr. Fritz Goerling in a draft document titled “‘Divine Grace’ in the Bible and in the *Qur’an*’, p. 17, “The many facets of the concept of “grace” are rendered by the word “charis” in the New Testament. “Charis” has even more meanings than “hesed.” Depending upon the context it can be translated by “favor”, “good will”, “lovingkindness”, “unmerited favor”, “goodness”, “mercy”, “grace”, or “gift.” “Charis” occurs 155 times in the New Testament, mainly in Paul’s letters. New Testament “grace” refers in particular to the unmerited gift of redemption through Jesus Christ. God, the Father is the source of this saving grace which is manifested in the sacrificial death of his Son. Christ the Savior gives the gift of salvation. The richness of God’s grace manifests itself in his lovingkindness shown to people, in the forgiveness of sins (Ephesians 1:7), the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23), and in spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 1:7).”

<sup>10</sup> C. L. Mitton, In George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), p. 468; Hastings, 313.

<sup>11</sup> Revell, 450.

an essential part of Christ's teaching, and the lesson is taught in all manner of ways. This concept of grace is present in His parables, his teachings, his healing acts, and his ministry in general.

The New Testament expression of the concept of grace reveals that it is fully disclosed by Christ and it also finds complete expression in him (Eph. 2:4-9). Christ is viewed as the chosen means by which God shows his favor to sinful man. Thus, the Christian who exercises faith in Christ has free access to God's grace (Romans 5:1, 2).<sup>12</sup> This explains why much of the expressions of grace are connected with Christ. This also makes the concept of divine grace in the Old Testament a concept worth studying since Christ is not expressly mentioned in it.

## II. Grace in the Old Testament

### A. Grace: "hesed" and "chen"

Unlike the New Testament, there is no single word in Hebrew that can represent all the meanings of the Greek *charis*.<sup>13</sup> The Hebrew words used are *hesed* and *chen*. In the Old testament it represents physical beauty (Prov. 1:9; 31:30; Psa. 45:2); favor, kindness, goodness, benevolence, friendship of God towards men, or of men toward other men (Gen. 6:8; 18:3; 19:19; 2 Sam. 10:2; 2 Tim. 1:9).<sup>14</sup> The Greek equivalent, *charis*, appears sixty-six times in the Septuagint where it stands as *Chen* about sixty-one times in the Hebrew.<sup>15</sup> Its rendition as *charis* in the Septuagint is practically a restriction of meaning which is due to the desire to represent the same Hebrew word by the same Greek word as far as possible. The idea of *Chen* is actually drawn from Oriental life and it refers to the goodwill and inclination of a superior toward an inferior. In this instance the

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<sup>12</sup> Revell, 451. Miller and Miller, 236 state that "It is to be taken in two different ways: the grace of Christ means not only his own personal attitude toward needy and sinful men; it means also that Christ is himself the sacrificial expression of grace.

<sup>13</sup> Revell, 450.

<sup>14</sup> John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature*, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids MI: Baker book House, 1981), p. 962; Goerling, p. 17 also states that "The Hebrew term "hesed" expresses more than the English word "grace." Depending upon the context it can be translated by "unmerited favor", "lovingkindness", "goodness", "steadfast love", "loyalty", "grace" and "mercy." "Lovingkindness" is perhaps the most comprehensive translation as it includes all the other variants of meaning."

<sup>15</sup> According to McClintock and Strong, the signification of the *charis* in the New Testament cannot be fairly estimated without reference to the idea expressed by the Hebrew word.

inferior person should be below the superior being to seek for “a spontaneous and gratuitous favor, or to invite the favor only by his needs, humility, and supplications.”<sup>16</sup>

It is a common Semitic term whose root meaning is “to favor someone” but its basic meaning is “favor.”<sup>17</sup> According to Unger and White, “the Hebrew noun *Chen* occurs 69 times, mainly in the Pentateuch and in the Historical books through Samuel. The word’s frequency increases in the poetic books, but it is rare in the prophetic books. The first occurrence is in Genesis 6:8: ‘But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.’”<sup>18</sup> It is used as the action of a superior to an inferior. The superior could be human or divine. It is clear that scripture has examples of humans showing *chen* to other humans (Gen. 33:8; 10, 15; 39:4; Ruth 2:2, 10) and God showing *chen* to humans (Jer. 31:2). There is no example of man showing *chen* to God. The point is clear that no man can do God a favor.

Upon an examination of the use of the two words, *chen* and *hesed* in the Old Testament, it appears that a quality is sometimes implied in the object which invites the favor.<sup>19</sup> In passages such as Genesis 32:5; 39: 4, 21; 47:27; 1:4; 1 Samuel 15:22; 25:8; 2 Samuel 16:4; Esther 2:15,17; 5:2; Proverbs 1:9; 3:22; 4:9; 5:19; 13:15; 11:16; Nahum 3:4, it seems like the object merits an antecedent quality. There are also other passages that suggest that such idea of a merit or pleasing quality is excluded. Such texts are Genesis 34:11; Exodus 3:21; 11:3; 12:36; Numbers 32:5; Ruth 2:2; 1 Samuel 1:18; 27:5; and Jeremiah 31:2. There are also other passages in which it is not clear whether a meritorious quality is present or excluded.<sup>20</sup>

## B. The Usages of “Grace” in the Old Testament

Many people understand that the concept of grace is present only in the New Testament. However, it is clear from a study of the Old Testament that the Old Testament also contains elements of God’s

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<sup>16</sup> McColintock and Strong, pp. 962, 963.

<sup>17</sup> Merrill F. Unger and William White (eds), *Nelson’s Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1980), p. 165.

<sup>18</sup> Unger and White, 165; See also R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1*,(Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 303.

<sup>19</sup> McColintock and Strong, pp. 963.

<sup>20</sup> See McColintock and Strong, p. 963 for a comprehensive discussion on these instances in the Old Testament

grace. Grace is displayed in God's choice of Abraham and Israel and His patience with the people. Also, there is a clear expression of grace in God's revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:6, 7.<sup>21</sup> The understanding of grace also stems from contrasting it with the keeping of the law. It is, however, clear that the keeping of the law is man's work, but the fact that man has the law to keep is something for which God only is to be thanked. It is seen as an element of divine grace. For example, Psalm 119 is the essence of legalism, but the writer feels overwhelmed throughout by the greatness of the mercy that disclosed such statutes to men. From the Psalmists, the initial (and vital) act is God's not men.

A careful study of what will be considered the most legalistic passages reveals that an absolute literal keeping of the law is never made a condition of salvation. The thought of transgression is at all times tempered with the thought of God's pardon. The whole sacrificial system, in so far as it is expiatory, rests on God's gracious acceptance of something in place of legal obedience, while the passages that offer God's mercy without demanding even a sacrifice (Isaiah 1:18; Micah 7:18-20, etc.) are countless.

In Ezekiel 16; 20; and 23, mercy is promised to a nation that is spoken of as hardly even desiring it, a most extreme instance. The description of the deplorable situation of Jerusalem's harlotry, Israel's rebellion, and the sins of Samaria and Jerusalem is so horrendous and atrocious that all they deserved was God's anger. However, they receive grace and mercy from Him. He picked them up from such deplorable states and made them a better nation.

A close study reveals that a mere negative granting of pardon is a most deficient definition of the Old Testament idea of God's mercy, which delights in conferring positive benefits. Examples of divine grace are the gift to Abraham of the land of Canaan, liberation from Egypt, food in the wilderness, salvation from enemies, deliverance from exile. These reveal that much of Israel's history can be felt to be the record of what God did for His people through no duty or compulsion, grateful thanksgiving for such unmerited blessings filling much of the Psalter.

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<sup>21</sup> Revell, 450.



The idea of “finding grace” or favor in the eyes of God is very common in the Old Testament.<sup>22</sup> The verb form of the word often used is *Chanan*. It is found in the ancient Ugaritic but with the same meaning as biblical Hebrew. It occurs about eighty times in the OT where it generally implies the extending of undeserved and unexpected favor.<sup>23</sup> The source of such undeserved favor is God who is repeatedly asked for such gracious acts since he is the only one who can do them (Num. 6:25; Gen. 43:29). In addition, his favor is seen in his deliverance from enemies and from evil. It is striking to note that God extends His ‘graciousness’ in His own sovereign way and will to whomever He chooses (Exod. 33:19).<sup>24</sup>

It is clear that the Christian development of the grace of God is more akin to the Hebrew *hesed* though the Septuagint uses *eleos*, “mercy” instead of Grace for its translation. *Hesed*, which means “loyal devotion grounded in love which goes beyond legal obligation and can be depended on to the utmost.”<sup>25</sup> This *hesed* is normally directed toward God’s chosen people who are bound to Him by covenant and who live in obedience to it. However, there are striking instances where *hesed* is shown to sinful and undeserving people. One can see these in God’s promise to David that His *hesed* will not depart from his offspring even if they sin (2 Sam 7:15) and in Isaiah 54:8 where God’s *hesed* is offered to disobedient people (cf. Psalm 103:10-110).<sup>26</sup>

Apart from the usage of the word *chen* or *hesed*, the Old Testament is also filled with what C. L. Mitton refers to as “a wondering awareness of God’s willingness to forgive those who are utterly undeserving of it.”<sup>27</sup> He states examples such as Psalms 32; 51; 130; 143; as well as the “servant songs” in Isaiah. Other examples are Ezekiel 36:25-29; the book of Jonah, and the deliverance of

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<sup>22</sup> Miller and Miller, 236; Hastings, 313 explains that the Old Testament passages that are rendered “favour” employ grace chiefly in the idiom “to find grace or favour”, either with God or with fellow men.

<sup>23</sup> Unger and White, 164.

<sup>24</sup> Unger and White, 164.

<sup>25</sup> Mitton, 467.

<sup>26</sup> Mitton, 467.

<sup>27</sup> Mitton, 468; Goerling p. 16, states that “God has shown his saving grace in the Old Testament starting with the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise to the liberation of the children of Israel from the slavery in Egypt, to the sending of his prophets until the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ.”



Israelites from Egypt. All the acts of God in these instances are due to his “grace” and not necessarily their own merit or good conduct.

### C. Grace Beyond Human Comprehension

These and many other instances actually call for a conclusion that humans cannot understand the grace of God. Theologically, Noah and Moses are said to have found grace in the sight of the Lord (Genesis 6:8; Exodus 33:12).<sup>28</sup> The question that needs to be asked here is the basis of such grace. The point has been made so far that there is no merit on the part of the recipient of grace. It is simply bestowed without any merits. This has generally been the case in the Christian doctrine of grace. The import of the question stems from the fact that in both instances, there were other people who could equally have “found grace.” What informed the choice of Noah or Moses?

In the case of Noah, the text reveals that the Lord was grieved at the way man’s wickedness on the earth had become (Gen. 6:5). This is followed by the statement that He will wipe all humans from the face of the earth because He is angry about the condition of man. However, the text goes on to explain that “Noah found grace” in His sight. This theme of God saving a few persons (in this case Noah and his family) when He is destroying the rest of mankind recurs in connection with issues of grace.<sup>29</sup> How can humans understand these decisions of God?<sup>30</sup> By the use of the word “grace”, Noah did not merit or do anything to deserve a special treatment. The sins of the people at the time were general, and that included Noah.

The average level of human understanding makes it difficult to come to terms with the election of Noah. This seems to make things sound like the concept of divine grace is really beyond human comprehension. In human thinking, any choice of an option over another must be made for a meritorious reason. Since this does not seem to be the case with God, the human being will find it really difficult to understand. Hence Unger and White are quick to note that

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<sup>28</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Workbook of the Old Testament, Vol. 1*,(Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 303.

<sup>29</sup> Trotter, 312.

<sup>30</sup> Trotter, 312.

God's 'graciousness' is shown in His own sovereign way and will to whomever He chooses.<sup>31</sup>

The same arguments can be made in the case of Moses. In Exodus 33, Moses is described as having found favor in the sight of God. Moses holds a discussion with God which has to do with the favor that God shows to him. Here, Moses requests that God should demonstrate such favor toward him. Moses also requests to see God's glory. The granting of this demand further revealed grace as a prominent attribute of God. In addition, Moses speaks of finding favor with the Lord in Numbers 11:4-17. In this passage, God brings judgment upon the people but that does not vitiate the point of God's favor toward Moses.<sup>32</sup> The answer to the question which arises seems to be beyond human comprehension. On what basis will God grant grace to Moses and not any of the other Israelites? What merits did Moses have that the rest did not have?

Another example of one who had God's Grace is Samuel. He is described in 1 Samuel 2:26 as growing in stature and in favor, both with God and with men. The meaning of this phrase, which is often used to describe the growth of a Child in the favor of God, is very significant. Such favor cannot be earned, since the object is only a child.<sup>33</sup> In all of these instances in the Old Testament, divine grace is beyond the understanding of humans. In such instances, humans in their limited understanding of the reason for God's choice, ask lots of questions. It becomes clear, however, that the unmerited favor of God has to do with God's choice, not men.

In addition, a primary example of God's compassion toward the people of earth is Jacob. He is also a primary example of the course of God's grace and mercy in the Old Testament. He was destined to be the father of God's people, Israel, yet his early life had much of mischief in it. He was involved in lots of treachery. Though without merit, a series of events caused him to seek out the help of God. Through it all God dealt with him in compassion and mercy. His name is included in the "faith" chapter—Hebrews 11—even though

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<sup>31</sup> Unger and White, 164.

<sup>32</sup> See Trotter, pp. 312, 313, for a complete discussion of divine grace in the life of Moses.

<sup>33</sup> See William Brenton Greene, Jr. "The Ethics of the Old Testament" In *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 1972), pp. 207-235 for a detailed discussion of how this theological question is ethically dealt with.

his actions did not reflect what we regard as faith. David Morsey states that “it is important to understand that God’s actions and attitudes toward His people are the same throughout the entire Bible. The Ten Commandments were an important standard of behavior for His people, but He was always quick to forgive their failures. And some of the most momentous purposes of God in the Bible were enacted through selected servants, such as Jacob, who had been flawed in their behavior patterns.”<sup>34</sup>

#### **D. The Knowledge of God and His Grace**

There are several other issues that seem to draw a conclusion to the question under study. By the way God chooses to show His grace on people, the human mind cannot adequately fathom. It seems to move us to the conclusion that divine grace is beyond human comprehension. However, once realises from the understanding of scripture that it would be possible to understand the saving acts of God if we know who He is. Thus, our understanding of His grace is directly linked with our knowledge of Him.

The knowledge of God made the people to fully understand Him. G. Ernest Wright, citing Thorkild Jacobsen, states that the God that the psalmists and the prophets knew transcended nature and the realms of their thought. According to him, the power of Yahweh the God of Israel was known because He had chosen the people for himself, humbled Pharaoh, and delivered Israel from slavery. He also pitied the people and made them a nation, gave them a law and a land inheritance.<sup>35</sup> Thus, God was known for the graceful acts He performed. To understand God is to know who He is.

The Old Testament principle of understanding God and his ways is linked directly with knowing Him. This concept of clearly spelt out in Proverbs 9:10: “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*” Thus, for one to fully understand God and his ways, he/she needs to have knowledge of who God is and how He operates. Many passages in the Old Testament describe the saving act of God and in each He adds

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<sup>34</sup> David Morsey, *Grace and Mercy in the Old Testament II – Jacob and Divine Compassion*, Online Draft Document, February, 1995, [www.harvestermission.org](http://www.harvestermission.org).

<sup>35</sup> G. Ernest Wright, *The Old Testament and its Environment*, (Bloomsbury Street: SCM Press, 1950), p. 20.

that people will know that “I am the Lord” (cf. Exodus 6:7; 7:5,17; 8:22; 10:2; Leviticus 23:43; 1 Kings 20:13; 20:28; Isaiah 45:3; 49:26; 50:1; Ezekiel 20:44; 36:11; 37:6). This same phrase is also observed in instances where He refrains from giving grace (cf. Ezekiel 7:4, 9). These considerations explain that we would be able to fully understand the expression of His grace if we know who He is and how He operates.

In the Old Testament, God is known for His acts of grace. Therefore, the people understood him. He is known as the God who brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, from slavery. Wright puts it this way:

Such was the God whom Israel knew. Wherever the people were or in whatever circumstance, they encountered and acknowledged the power of the God who had delivered them. Looking back to the days of their fathers, they recognized his gracious providence in revealing Himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, even though under a different name or epithets. In Egypt he saw their affliction and visited them. At Mt. Sinai or Horeb and again in battle with Sisera, he was recognized in the phenomena of a storm.<sup>36</sup>

This knowledge of God helped the Israelites to relate with God as He is- a gracious, loving, powerful, and merciful God. Relating with Him that way, Israelites had a better understanding of how He operates in showing favor upon people. This tells us that humans can understand the grace of God if they know who He is. They cannot use their human understanding to estimate how God’s grace should be rendered to humans. It will take one to know God in order to understand how He operates. In sum, divine grace falls within human understanding to the extent that humans know God, the provider of grace. A limited knowledge of God means we cannot fully understand His grace. An in-depth knowledge of God means a deep understanding of how His grace operates.

### **Conclusion**

It has been understood that Grace is a very important concept in Christian doctrine. Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23) and “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23), it will only take divine grace for anyone to gain Salvation. Thus, divine grace is a very important element in the salvation of mankind.

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<sup>36</sup> Wright, 21.

The use of grace in the New Testament helps to conceptualize a doctrine of grace in the New Testament. However, its dispersing usage in the Old Testament makes a concept of Old Testament grace difficult to outline. It is however clear that the Old Testament presents divine grace as much as the New Testament. Also, “grace in the Old Testament is just as much an act of the sovereign will of God as is grace in the New Testament.”<sup>37</sup> “Both Old Testament “hesed” and New Testament “charis” could be described most comprehensively by “God’s lovingkindness” This *lovingkindness* is expressed in particular through the unmerited grace of redemption. Thus, in addition to God’s common grace, an individual can experience God’s saving grace.”<sup>38</sup> It also is clear from the instances in the Old Testament where God shows favor toward men that, such acts defy human understanding. This makes it difficult for man to fully understand divine grace. The only clue that we have is in the fact that the saving and deliverance acts of God, which are elements of his grace. These acts of grace are directly linked to knowing Him and how He operates. Thus, humans can understand the concept of divine grace in proportion to the rate at which they know God and how He operates. So long as humans have a limited knowledge of God, they will have limited understanding of his grace.

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<sup>37</sup> Trotter, p. 314; See also Morsey.

<sup>38</sup> Goerling, 17.

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