

## Salvation in the Old Testament

### Introduction:

1. A common question: Was every one in the Bible saved the same way? How were O.T. saints saved who lived before Christ died on the cross?
2. Some would say that we are saved by looking back in faith to what Jesus did on the cross, and O.T. saints were saved by looking forward to the cross. This may sound good, but we do not see any example of this in Scripture.
3. Some of the O.T. prophets wrote of a suffering Messiah, but, according to 1 Peter 1:10-11, they didn't understand all that they wrote. They were ministering not unto themselves, but unto a future generation that would understand and preach these things.
  - Even the twelve apostles couldn't put it all together. The thought of Christ dying didn't make any sense to them. Matt. 16:21-23; Luke 18:31-34
4. So, how were the O.T. saints saved? Will there be O.T. saints in heaven? Of course there will be (Abraham, Moses, Samuel, David, Daniel, the prophets). What will be their song in heaven? How did they get there? Of course, the blood of Christ **secures** the salvation of every person in every age, but what did God specifically look for in their lives on earth that He would grant them heaven?
5. I would like for us to examine three clear Bible principles.

### First, O.T. saints did receive many promises of God.

1. Turn to Hebrews 11:8-16. According to this text, they **saw** God's promises, **were persuaded** of them, and **embraced** them. cf. vs. 33
2. Not only this, the O.T. saints received promises of a coming Messiah and anticipated Him.
  - Luke 24:21 – They were looking for a Redeemer
  - Luke 24:25-27 – What was the problem? They didn't **believe** all that the prophets had spoken.
  - John 1:45 – Philip knew what he was looking for.
  - John 12:34 – The law **did** point people to a Messiah; in fact, Peter uses a prophecy of Moses when preaching to Israel in Acts 3:22.
3. Here's the point: While we recognize that O.T. saints did **not** have an understanding of the finished work of Christ (the gospel as we know it), they weren't these mindless robots that were just ignorantly carrying out the ordinances of the law, kept in utter spiritual darkness, with no promises to trust in. Examples:
  - Simeon – Luke 2:25
  - Anna – Luke 2:38
4. By faith, they were looking for a Messiah to come. Don't underestimate their realm of knowledge and understanding.
  - Rom. 15:8 states that Jesus was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God to confirm the **promises** made unto the fathers.

## Second, O.T. saints were not saved by keeping the law.

1. The law was an expression of the righteousness of God. This is why 1 John 3:4 states that "sin is the transgression of the law." How many have sinned? All! Then how many have broken God's law? All! "...by the law is the knowledge of sin." Rom. 3:20
2. Let's look at a key statement of Jesus in John 7:19 to the entire crowd of people, all of whom had come to this feast to **keep** the law, and many of whom had tender hearts because they believed on Christ (vs. 31). Yet, Jesus stands in front of that entire group of Jews and said, "**None of you keep the law.**"
3. The Bible is clear. The law could **not** save anybody.
  - The law could not give life – Gal. 3:21 (2 Cor. 3:7 calls it the ministration of death and the context is Moses).
  - The law could not impart righteousness – Gal. 3:21 (The context is O.T. when the law was given.)
  - The law could not justify – Acts 13:39 (2 Cor. 3:9 calls it the ministration of condemnation and the context is Moses.)
  - The law could not make anyone perfect – Heb 7:19 – "For the law made nothing perfect..."
4. You say, "But pastor, what if they offered the prescribed sacrifices, couldn't they be said to be **keeping** the law?" That is semantically a play on words. The very reason they are offering the sacrifice is because they were acknowledging that they **broke** God's law, and O.T. sacrifices were continual, year after year. Why? Because they **kept** breaking it. Even the priest had to offer up for **his** sins as well as the people (there was no chair for him to rest upon. Why? Because his work was never done - the Bible says he standeth daily).
  - Some people actually believe that if they sinned, but offered a sacrifice (**now** they weren't breaking the law any more, they were keeping it), they were okay until they sinned again. Then it was, "grab your animal, let's get saved again." If they happened to die before they could get that animal sacrificed, they went to hell. This, of course, is ludicrous. We miss the whole point for the law and the sacrificial system.
5. These sacrifices were a **reminder** of their sinfulness and their need for the Lord, and were a **shadow** of good things to come. Hebrews 10:1-8 teaches that God **does not** and **did not** take pleasure in these sacrifices for sin. This wasn't the means of securing their salvation and pleasing God in regards to salvation.
6. These ordinances and sacrifices were shadows of what God would one day do for Israel.
  - The Sabbath day rest was a **reminder** of the kingdom rest God would give them one day.
  - The sacrifices were a **reminder** of the day when God would blot out their sins forever.
  - Circumcision was a **reminder** of how God had separated them from the pagan Gentile nations, and they would one day reign over these nations.
7. They **knew** these things. They had the prophets and multitudes of prophecies to study and learn from.

8. The keeping of the law could not save O.T. saints – Luke 16:27-31
  - In this story, the rich man doesn't want his family to end up in hell like him. He asks Abraham to send Lazarus from the dead to warn his family.
  - Abraham says, "They have Moses **and** the prophets, let them hear them." He didn't say, "They have the law of Moses, let them hear and keep that." He said, "Let them hear Moses **and** the prophets."
9. No man ever **did** or ever **can** fulfill the law so as to merit salvation by the performance of it. Were there people that walked righteously before God and sought to keep God's law? Yes. Does the Bible say they were saved and rewarded heaven because of it? No, it does not. You must read that into the text to arrive at that conclusion.
10. Anyone who would seek to gain God's favor by keeping the law was bound to come up short.
  - At the end of his life, Moses rebelled against God's instruction and smote the rock twice.
  - John the Baptist's parents sought to keep God's law, but Zacharias was rebuked by the angel for not believing God's message.
  - The Pharisee sought to keep God's law, was filled with self-righteousness, and went down to his house **not** justified.
  - Paul kept the law outwardly, yet was the chief of sinners, a blasphemer, and in desperate need of salvation.
  - How about Peter's words in Acts 15:10 - "...why tempt ye God, to put a yoke (the law) upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear (to lift, to endure, to sustain)?" As hard as one may have tried, the law still stood up straight and tall and called you guilty and cried out for your condemnation.
11. Then how were they saved? If it wasn't through keeping the law or looking forward to Jesus' death on the cross, then how were they saved?

### **Third, O.T. saints were saved by faith.**

1. The **requirement** for salvation in every age is faith, and the **object** of that faith is God. We understand that the **content** of faith changes in the various dispensations.
  - Abraham - The content of his faith was God's promise that his seed would be as the stars.
  - Abel - The content of his faith was God's command to offer a blood sacrifice. Why did he do that which was right? According to Hebrews 11:4 it was because of his faith in God.
  - Noah - The content of his faith was God's command to build an ark. He became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. Heb 11:7
  - Believers today - The content of our faith is the finished work of Jesus Christ.
2. It has always been a faith issue between a person's heart and God. Hebrews 11 makes this clear.
  - Verses 1-2 - Through faith, O.T. saints obtained a good report.
  - Verse 39 - Through faith, O.T. saints obtained a good report (the promise here is referring to Christ. They were looking for a Messiah, but He didn't come in their lifetime.)

- Verse 6 - It is faith that pleases God. It wasn't the sacrifice of an animal. We saw in Heb. 10:6, 8 that God has no pleasure in those sacrifices - it's that faith in that person's heart that pleases God.
3. What is normal for Christians who have placed their faith and trust in Jesus Christ?
    - Ephesians 2:10 teaches that it is good works. Do those good works save us (give us brownie points with God) and take us to heaven? No, they are the natural out-growth of our faith.
  4. What was normal for someone in the O.T. who had placed their faith in God?
    - Read Hebrews 11 and you'll see - good works. They naturally followed.
    - Any righteousness they could possibly do was all rooted in faith - Hebrews 11:33
  5. Paul even uses David (who was under the O.T. law system) as an example of how God imputes righteousness by faith without works. Romans 4:6-8 - Let's look at some more verses in Romans 4:
    - The promise to Abraham **and his seed (Israel)** was not made through the law, but through faith. vs. 13
    - "...if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise of none effect." - vs. 14
    - Why? "Because the law worketh wrath..." - vs. 15
    - Salvation is of faith that it might be by grace, to those under the law and those called apart from the law (like Abraham) - vs. 16
  6. Abraham is used as an illustration in Romans 4:18-22. Notice that the issue was faith in God's promise. Was Abraham the only O.T. person capable of exercising believing faith? Not according to Hebrews 11. It names people that lived before and during the law and commends them for their faith in God.
  7. This brings us to an important issue. If it is **impossible** to please God apart from faith, now we see why the law system could not save. You say, "Why not?"
    - Because Paul shows us that the law is **not** of faith - Gal. 3:12
    - The law is not about believing, but it says, "What have you done?" It requires strict obedience. The Bible teaches that the man that doeth them perfectly, at all times and in all places, he shall live in them. But if in any case he fails, he forfeits his life. Gal. 3:12 cf. Romans 6:23
    - This is why Paul says that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. He says it is evident because the just shall live by faith - Galatians 3:11 (This is an O.T. quotation.)
  8. Old Testament saints did not have the completed work of Christ to look back upon, but they **could** love God and believe and trust in God and His promises.
  9. Jesus said the entire law system hung on two commands – love God and your neighbor.
    - Mark 12:28-34 - The law did not hang on the sacrificial system. Again, this was a shadow of good things to come and to remind Israel of the day He would blot out their sins forever. It provided a temporary forgiveness for sin when it was offered in faith and as they walked with God. It was a way to maintain their fellowship with God, but could not provide eternal salvation - only faith could do this.

**In Conclusion:**

1. Do not think for a moment that Old Testament saints could not have a relationship with God. Abraham was called the friend of God and David was a man after God's own heart.
2. As we have seen, through the ages, man's faith has been expressed in many different ways, depending on the revelation of God at that point and time.
3. But Hebrews 11 and Romans 4 teach us that the basis of their relationship with God was faith. Their acceptance before God was rooted in faith. How were they saved? By God's grace through faith.