

Introduction to Exodus (Part II)

QUESTION: “You said that Old Testament believers were saved by grace through faith just like we are, and I agree. You said the New Covenant actually accomplishes redemption but the old did not. My question is, How were the Old Testament believers saved if just like us but without the New Covenant?”

I. What is “COVENANT”?

Last week, we saw that the key to understanding the book of Exodus, and really to understanding the whole Bible, is understanding the whole idea of “covenant.” Covenant is a lovely, beautiful word. When God makes *promises* to someone in the context of a blood covenant, the result is always the *creation* of *relationship*.^{*} “Covenant” is the means by which God actually “creates” a *people* for Himself. The heart and soul of “covenant” is encapsulated in this one awesome, and often repeated phrase in the Scriptures: “I will be their God, and they will be my people.” *This* is the beating heart—this is the goal—of *every* covenant that God has ever initiated with human beings.

II. What are the COVENANTS?

Last week, we looked at three covenants that all share this identical goal: the Abrahamic Covenant with its *promises* (land, seed, and blessing), the Mosaic Covenant with its *requirements* (Ten Commandments), and then the New Covenant, which *fulfills* the previous two Covenants.

The Abrahamic Covenant with its *promises* always assumed the *requirements* that would come with the Mosaic Covenant. A holy God cannot live in covenant relationship with an unholy people. An unholy people cannot ultimately inherit the land and the promises of God’s blessing.

- ✓ Genesis 17:1–2 (NET) — The LORD appeared to [Abram] and said, “I am the sovereign God. *Walk before me and be blameless. THEN I will confirm my covenant between me and you, and I will give you a multitude of descendants.*”

The Abrahamic Covenant with its *promises* always assumed the *requirements* that would come with the Mosaic Covenant. On the other hand, the Mosaic Covenant with its *requirements* always assumed the *promises* that God had already given in the Abrahamic Covenant (“covenant blessings”). The whole point of spelling out the *requirements* was the fulfillment of the *promises*.

- ✓ Jeremiah 11:3–5 — Cursed be the man who does not hear the words of this covenant that I commanded your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, from the iron

^{*} Cf. The Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New Covenants. The Noahic Covenant is possibly an exception to this rule, but the Noahic covenant is also a significant exception in that it was “inaugurated” without the shedding of blood. The Davidic Covenant created a relationship without the shedding of blood (2 Sam. 7), but the Davidic Covenant comes after, and in the context of the Abrahamic and Mosaic Covenants. The Davidic covenant is also unique in that it is made with an *individual* and his son (singular), grandson (singular), etc.

furnace, saying, Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you. *So shall you be my people, and I will be your God*, that I may *confirm* the oath that I swore to your fathers [Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob], to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day.”

The New Covenant, then, fulfills the *promises* of the Abrahamic Covenant *by* fulfilling the *requirements* of the Mosaic Covenant. But how does it do all this? Let’s zoom in, now, for just a little more detail.

III. The “Abrahamic” COVENANT

The *promises* of the Abrahamic Covenant were very “two-dimensional.” On the one hand there was the physical Abraham with his physical descendents through Isaac and Jacob. God promised that this physical *seed* would greatly multiply and inherit a tiny strip of *land* called “Canaan.” When we look at it this way, we can actually think of a “fulfillment” of the Abrahamic Covenant that’s already happened.

- ✓ Joshua 21:43–45 — Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers... Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass.
- ✓ 1 Kings 3:8; 4:20 — Your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen, a great people, too many to be numbered or counted for multitude... Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by the sea. They ate and drank and were happy.

But Abraham understood that the goal of the physical seed was a *spiritual* seed. The goal of those who shared Abraham’s genes was a people who shared Abraham’s faith. See the two dimensions? Abraham understood that the goal of the tiny strip of land called Canaan was actually the inheritance of the entire earth – so that the *entire earth* would be a place where only righteousness dwells (cf. Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16). See the two dimensions? The goal of the Abrahamic Covenant was not just a physical Israel in a tiny strip of land called Canaan, but a spiritual, believing Israel in all the earth for all eternity (Gen. 1). In this bigger, grander, ultimate sense, the Abrahamic Covenant never even approached a fulfillment in the Old Testament.

IV. The “Mosaic” COVENANT

In the Mosaic covenant, God created a *physical, ethnic* people for Himself and promised them all the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant *if* they would obey His voice and walk in His ways – *if* they would also be a *spiritual, believing* Israel. By means of a Covenant, God created a *physical* nation from Abraham’s physical descendents, but He required that this *entire* physical nation should also share in the faith of Abraham and walk blamelessly and obediently before Him.

But as it turned out, this simply wasn’t possible because the Covenant that had created the people could not actually change the *heart*. Think about it! If the Old Covenant had actually been able to *accomplish redemption*, then every member of the Old Covenant people (every circumcised

Israelite) would have been a “Christian.” If the Old Covenant had actually been able to accomplish redemption, then the covenant people (Israel) would have been a nation of saints. But the Old Covenant could *not* accomplish redemption. The covenant that created a people from the physical descendants of Abraham with laws and commands written on tablets of stone was not able at the same time to create a people that shared in Abraham’s faith.

Now it wasn’t the covenant that was “flawed.” There was nothing “wrong” with the covenant – there was just something seriously wrong with the people. Their hearts were hearts of stone. And so as a part of the Mosaic covenant we have not only covenant blessings for obedience, but the terrors of covenant curses for disobedience (cf. Lev. 26). Over, and over, and over again, a sinful, rebellious covenant people rejected and broke the covenant and brought upon themselves the covenant curses. (cf. Jer. 7:22-26; 11:3-8) **How were the promises of God ever to be fulfilled? – A spiritual, believing people as many as the stars, who would ultimately inherit all the earth, and live together with God in joyful and intimate covenant relationship?**

V. The “New” COVENANT

In the New Covenant, God said that *He* would do it! *He* would fulfill the *promises* of the Abrahamic covenant by providing *Himself* for the fulfillment of all the *requirements* of the Mosaic covenant. But how would God do this? What exactly would be *new* about the *New* Covenant?

- ✓ Jeremiah 31:31–34 (cf. 31:1) — Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a NEW COVENANT with the **house** of Israel and the **house** of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the COVENANT that I will make with the **house** of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And ***I will be their God, and they shall be my people.*** And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall **all** know me, **from the least of them to the greatest**, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.

In the New Covenant, God puts His law within us, and writes it on our hearts! In the New Covenant God forgives our iniquity and remembers our sin no more! But now wait a minute! Did God not write His law on the hearts of anyone under the Old Covenant? Yes, He did!

- ✓ Psalm 40:8 (cf. 37:31) — I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.
- ✓ Isaiah 51:7 — Listen to me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is my law; fear not the reproach of man.

Was no one “forgiven,” and did no one “know” the Lord even under the Old Covenant? Yes, they were, and yes, they did!

- ✓ Romans 4:3, 6-8 — For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ... David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom

God counts righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

So what, really, is the “improvement” of the New Covenant that Jeremiah prophesies? It’s this: *When* God makes the New Covenant, He actually creates a new **kind of people** – a **spiritual, believing** Israel where **ALL** truly **know** God from the least to the greatest (Jer. 31). A nation no longer divided between North and South (Samaria and Jerusalem), a nation no longer divided between people who worship Baal and people who worship Yahweh, but a “nation” where all are united as one, because **ALL** have come to share in the *faith* of Abraham. Before the New Covenant was in effect, a “nation” actually marked out and defined by the “new hearts” of regeneration simply could not exist. This is because the covenant that created the people in the Old Testament could not at the same time change their hearts.

So how can we have any “Christians” *at all* under the Old Covenant? – If the Old Covenant didn’t have the power to change hearts – if the Old Covenant didn’t have the power to actually accomplish redemption? We saw last week that there were many Israelites who lived simply **by faith** in the covenant **promises** that God gave to Abraham. They **loved** the covenant **requirements** mediated through Moses – they loved God’s laws and commands – and yet they saw that they *could not* inherit the promises by their own covenant obedience because they were sinners. And so they just *believed* God – that somehow, someway, through the coming of the Messiah first promised in Genesis 3:14-15, God Himself would do it – God Himself would miraculously fulfill *His covenant promise* by providing Himself for the fulfillment of all His **covenant requirements**. So every single one of these Israelites was saved in just the same way as we are: by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and all to the glory of God alone (cf. Gen. 15:6; Rom. 4). But what about the fact that there wasn’t yet any New Covenant? It’s *impossible* for *anyone* to *ever* be saved apart from the New Covenant. So Paul writes:

- ✓ Romans 3:23–25 — **All** [both OT and NT saints] have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and [**all**; both OT and NT saints] are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his **blood** [blood of the covenant], to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.

When God saved His Old Testament elect by grace and through faith alone, He simply showed ahead of time that *they* were among the people with whom He would one day make the New Covenant. Their faith in God’s promise revealed *who they really were* – they were members in advance, “members-in-waiting,” of a Covenant not yet even made. (This is a mystery!) And so we read in Hebrews:

- ✓ Hebrews 12:18-19, 22–24 (cf. 11:39-40) — For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them... **But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem**, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, **and to the spirits of the [Old Covenant] righteous**

made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Here we see the spirits of the saints under the Old Covenant made perfect through Jesus, the mediator of a New Covenant. Here we see the salvation of even the Old Covenant saints as actual members of the *New* Covenant. No longer now “members in advance,” or “members in waiting,” but members of a New Covenant now completely and fully *inaugurated* through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. But there’s more!

When God forgave and justified those in the Old Testament who truly repented and believed, He showed ahead of time that they were among the people with whom He would one day make the New Covenant. These were the true descendents of Abraham, sharing not *just* Abraham’s genes, but Abraham’s faith. (Rom. 2:28-29; Rev. 2:9; 3:9) But as long as the Old Covenant was still in effect, this “true” seed of Abraham could only exist as a small *remnant* within the nation of Israel. They didn’t yet exist as a *separate* and *distinct* “covenant *people*.” They couldn’t – because the New Covenant was still future. The blood of the New Covenant had not yet been shed. And so it was always needful for them to urge many of their own covenant brothers and sisters to turn from their idols and to “know the Lord!” But when the New Covenant finally came, the “chaff” that had always existed under the Old Covenant would be cast away:

- ✓ Matthew 3:7–10 — When [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father,’ for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Can you see what’s happening? With the coming of the New Covenant, a new kind of *people* are created – because the New Covenant contains within itself the power to change the *heart*. With the coming of the New Covenant, the spiritual “kernel” (the spiritual “remnant”) that always existed under the Old Covenant, now flowers forth as the actual Covenant *people*. *This means* that in this New Covenant people, *all* now know the Lord from the least to the greatest! That’s why Paul can write his epistles simply to the saints who are in Christ Jesus! In the New Covenant, God actually creates *a people* not by writing laws and commands on two tablets of stone and entrusting those tablets to a physical seed, but by writing His law on our hearts and actually transforming us (“from these stones”) into the “honest to goodness” seed of Abraham who now share in the *faith* of Abraham, our father (Rom. 4:11-12).

We can’t forget that the New Covenant was first promised to Israel and to Judah. At first the new people created by the new Covenant were almost all Jews. But the good news is that by His almighty, infinite power, God can raise up children for Abraham even “from these stones.” So we Gentiles have now been grafted into this “spiritual, believing, New Covenant Israel” – along with such Old Testament Gentiles as Rahab and Ruth. (cf. Rom. 11) By God’s sovereign grace, we are now full and equal *heirs* of every single covenant promise ever made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom. 4; cf. Gal. 4:26-27). As the true “*seed*” of Abraham, we will inherit the “*land*” and the “*blessing*” forever, and ever, and ever (Mat. 5:5; cf. Ps. 37:11, 22, 29; 2 Pet. 3:13; cf.

Rom. 4:13) . Here in this room today, ***we are*** the new ***kind*** of people that God promised He would create with the coming of the New Covenant.

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 6:16 (cf. Heb. 8) — ***We are*** the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and ***I will be their God, and they shall be my people.***”

And so as we look around us, we understand that (*as members of the New Covenant people*) we ***all*** have the law written on our hearts (this *is* the assembly of the New Covenant people). As we look around us, we understand that we ***all*** have the Spirit (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2). As we look around us, we understand that we ***all together*** know the Lord – our sins are forgiven, and he remembers our iniquity no more. And ***so*** we rejoice that in the New Covenant, there can no longer ***be*** any covenant curses – ***only*** covenant ***blessings***.

This is what God said when He was creating the people of the Old Covenant:

- ✓ Exodus 19:5–6 — Now therefore, IF you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be ***my treasured possession among all peoples***, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a ***kingdom of priests*** and a ***holy nation***. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

But now Peter takes the language that once applied to the Old Covenant Israel ***if*** they would obey, and sees its true fulfillment in the pure, holy, spiritual membership of the New Covenant Israel that God Himself has created by His glorious power and grace!

- ✓ 1 Peter 2:9 — But ***you*** [my brothers and sisters] ARE a chosen race, a ***royal priesthood***, a ***holy nation***, a ***people for his own possession***, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Conclusion

Under the Old Covenant, not only did the “born again” seed of Abraham exist only as a small remnant within the covenant people, but their ***experience*** of the fullness of their salvation was still limited by the curtains and walls that surrounded even just the symbols of God’s presence in the Tabernacle. The Mediator of the New Covenant had not yet come. The blood of the New Covenant had not yet been shed.

But now all that has changed. God has sent His one and only Son into the world. This is the one who, on the night in which He was betrayed, would take a cup and give it to His disciples, saying:

- ✓ Matthew 26:28 (cf. Hebrews 8) — This is ***my blood of the covenant***, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

My brothers and sisters, Christ fulfilled all the ***requirements*** of the Old Covenant in our place!

- ✓ Galatians 4:4–7 (NASB; cf. Rom. 8:1-4) — God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, ***born under the Law***, so that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

Not only has Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the Old Covenant in our place, but He has born all the ***curses*** of the Old Covenant in our place, and now all that is left for us is the blessing of Abraham.

- ✓ Galatians 3:13–14 (NASB) — Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE”— in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

And so as the Mediator of the New Covenant, as the one who sheds His own blood to purchase us, it is truly only in the face of Jesus Christ that we behold now as in a flawless mirror the full **GLORY** of our covenant-making God. Here is an ***experience*** of salvation, and a ***vision*** of God’s glory that the Old Covenant saints never had and never knew. (cf. Heb. 11:39-40; 1 Pet. 1:11-12) So listen, now, to the words of Paul:

- ✓ 2 Corinthians 3:5–11, 18 (NASB) — God [has] made us adequate as servants of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, in letters engraved on stones, came with glory, so that the sons of Israel could not look intently at the face of Moses because of the glory of his face, fading as it was, ***how will the ministry of the Spirit fail to be even more with glory?*** For if the ministry of condemnation has glory, ***much more does the ministry of righteousness abound in glory.*** For indeed what had glory, in this case has no glory ***because of the glory that surpasses it.*** For if that which fades away was with glory, ***much more that which remains is in glory...*** ***But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror [in the face of Jesus Christ] the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image FROM GLORY TO GLORY.***

Let us faithfully ***behold*** the glory of our covenant making God in the face of our Covenant mediator, Jesus Christ – so that we may then, in turn, be more and more transformed into His image, from glory to glory!