

## Were Old Testament Saints Born Again?

This is a question which often arises when considering the walk which the Old Testament saints had with God. I think many have popularized the notion of Old Testament regeneration because it is difficult to explain how Old Testament saints could walk with God like some did. While that is obviously the case, and they had some sort of divine enablement which enabled them to walk with God, I think to embrace the notion that Old Testament saints were born again is to dismiss the cross-work of Christ as that indispensable payment for sin which enables the Father to bring about the miracle of the New Birth.

One of the biggest problems with the concept of Old Testament regeneration is the fact that the Lord Jesus died to make the new birth possible. To say that the new birth was available to people before the work of redemption was complete is to discount the importance of the cross of Christ. The Scriptures, time and time again, indicate that the new covenant enablements to really know God are the result of the finished work of Christ. They are not available to the saints until after the work of Christ is accomplished. If God could have taken total, saving possession of Old Testament saints before the cross of Christ, then why didn't He? If God could have regenerated Old Testament saints, giving them the new man and His permanently indwelling Holy Spirit, then why did Old Testament justified saints spend thousands of years separated from God in the place of comfort known as Abraham's Bosom? I will grant the point that the Old Testament saint had some sort of interaction in his conscience with the Holy Spirit which enabled him to respond in a positive way to the truth of God; but, I think we discount the indispensability of the work of Christ if we call that enablement the new birth.

Why did Old Testament saints look forward to the arrival of Christ if they could, in their day, possess all of the divine enablements Jesus came to purchase through His death?

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 8:56** "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw *it* and was glad."

Why did Jesus come in order to make an abundant life possible, if the sheep already possessed all the resources to make that life possible?

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 10:10** "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."

Notice also the distinction that the Lord makes to His disciples concerning the relationship they had with the Holy Spirit before and the relationship they would have after the finished work of Christ.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 14:16-18** "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever -- "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. "I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

Notice, in the above context, what was going to happen as a result of Jesus going away (ascension to the Father): Jesus was going to send the comforter. Notice also, the distinction between what the Apostles had as a present reality in contrast to what they were going to have as a future reality. As their present reality, the Holy Spirit was with them; as a future reality, the Holy Spirit was going to dwell (remain) in them. This spirit of adoption, through which the Holy Spirit took up permanent residence in the believer, is half of the new birth, with the other half being the giving of a new person.

The reason Old Testament saints did not immediately go into the presence of God upon their deaths was that they were not yet born again. They bore an old sin nature into death because Christ had not yet died; their old man could not yet be positionally put off.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Romans 6:6** knowing this, that our old man was crucified with *Him*, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 7:38, 39** "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet *given*, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Does not the above verse settle this issue? The Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus had not yet been crucified and arisen from the dead.

What is the significance of the resurrection of Christ and the release of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the church if Old Testament saints were already in possession of those gifts? The gifts of the Holy Spirit are given in response to the Lord Jesus Christ having presented to the Father the value of His finished work as we see in the following verse.

**Acts 2:33** "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

Notice, in the above verse, that the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is as a result of the ascension of Christ to the Father. Jesus dies for sin, presents the value of that work to the Father, and is granted gifts which enable the saints, through the enablements of the new birth, to more fully commune with God.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 4:8** Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men."

This context indicates that the giving of the Spirit's enablements was in response to the merits of Christ being presented to the Father. Of course, some might say from this context that it was the gifts that Christ died to provide and not the reality of the new birth itself.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Philippians 3:10** that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

According to this context, the power to know Him comes through the power of His resurrection.

**Hebrews 6:4-6** For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put *Him* to an open shame.

In this context, the power of the age to come is a reference to the enablements of the Holy Spirit, which will be fully manifested and available to the believer even more fully than they are today. If these powers, which enable a person to experience communion to God, belong to the age to come, then it must be assumed that they were not enablements which were available to the saints of previous generations.

Likewise the present enablement of the New Testament saint is called the firstfruits of the Spirit. What the New Testament church age believer has is identified in Scripture as the firstfruits of the spirit.

**Romans 8:23** Not only *that*, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.

If the Old Testament saint was already born again, then why did Christ have to come that they might have life? If that life is the capacity to commune with God, then why did Christ say, "I have come that they might have life", instead of saying "I have come in order to pay for the life they already have"?

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 10:27, 28** " My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.

Why did he say, "I give to them eternal life," if the capacity for communion with God was already available to them?

<sup>NKJ</sup> **1 Peter 1:3** Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Notice here that God the Father bestows upon us the new birth by the means of the resurrection of Christ.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 1:18-20** the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,

According to this passage, when did the Father bestow upon us the exceeding greatness of His power? When (and not before) He raised Jesus from the dead.

The promises of the giving of the Spirit and the giving of the new heart in the Old Testament appear to be referring to enablements which are a part of the kingdom age as we see below. If these enablements are part of the new covenant, then it stands to reason that they are not components of the old.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ezekiel 36:26-28** "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*. "Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Jeremiah 31:31-35** "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah -- "not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they all shall know Me, from the

least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

Furthermore, the Old Testament saint looked forward to the enablements which would be brought to them as a result of the finished work of Christ.

Quite frankly, for me to adopt the view that Old Testament saints were born again, I would have to downplay the significance of the cross of Christ, an event which was ordained to bring about the realities of the born again experience as we see in the following context.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Titus 3:5-7** not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, that having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

There is one thing I would like us to notice concerning this context: the use of the phrase "poured out." We see this phrase in several passages describing the exchange which took place upon the ascension of Christ to the throne of God, to present the value of His finished work and God's response of pouring out the enabling gifts to the church; gifts which enabled His people to know Him like they could never have known Him before. Regeneration is poured out abundantly on us through the merits of Jesus Christ.

Once again, to say that the Holy Spirit is poured out before the work of Christ was accomplished, is to discount the importance of the work of Christ.

There are yet more questions for those who believe that the Old Testament believer was already born again. Why was salvation such a positive thing to be anticipated in the future, if the Old Testament saint already had access to those divine enablements?

Why do the Scriptures speak of a wonderful future anticipation of the age of grace, if those enablements were already available to the Old Testament saint?

Why was the Old Testament saint anticipating a salvation which would result in a capacity to walk in the commandments of God, if that capacity was already in their possession?

<sup>NKJ</sup> **1 Peter 1:10, 11** Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace *that would come* to you, <sup>11</sup> searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

Quite frankly, the governing principle over the affairs of men, before the work of Christ, was the Law of Moses. Even as it foretold the sufferings of Christ, the Law was imposed upon Israel to keep in check the lusts of the flesh, until Christ could come along and obtain a system of grace operating assets. Now saints can serve the Lord by the power of these gifts.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **John 1:17** For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Galatians 3:24, 25** Therefore the law was our tutor *to bring us* to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.

Here is another passage which teaches that the divine enablements of God were procured for believers as a result of the ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 1:15-20** Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,

## The Promise

**The term “promise” is the salvation from the perspective of the Old Testament saint.**

**Ephesians 1:13** In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of **promise**,

<sup>J</sup> **Acts 2:33** "Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the **promise** of the Holy **Spirit**, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

The Promise is the Old Testament saints perspective on Salvation. He looked forward to the day and time when he would be completely empowered by the Spirit to commune with god.

**The fact that Old Testament Saints were not born again is underscored by the fact that Old Testament saints did not go to heaven, but rather to a place of comfort away from the presence of God.**

The condition of confirmed righteous before the cross is set forth in the following passage:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Luke 16:22, 23** "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. "And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

The account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16 presents to us the reality of the abode of pre-cross saints upon their death. Because sin had not yet been put away, pre-cross saints died associated with their unredeemed sin, and, as such, could not abide in the presence of God. However, since they were justified by believing in God's coming One as the suffering provision for their sin, they were sequestered away from the presence of God, in a place of comfort, until such time when Christ would come along, and cancel their sin debt. Then, and only then, might they enter into the presence of God. This place of confinement with comfort appears to have been below the surface of the earth. This is precisely the reality which existed at the time of the account of the rich man and Lazarus.

That the pre-cross saint went to a place of confined comfort can also be demonstrated from the book of Ephesians:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Ephesians 4:8, 9** Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended" -- what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth?

Before the Lord ascended to heaven, he descended into the lower parts of the earth and "lead captivity captive". This can only be a reference to Christ leading those who were confined to Abraham's Bosom, out of their captivity and into the glorious presence of the Father.

Quite often, the Old Testament refers to this place of confined comfort as "prison," and those who are sequestered there as "prisoners." This is apparent in the following context:

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Zechariah 9:11, 12**  
As for you also,

Because of the blood of your covenant,  
I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.  
Return to the stronghold,  
You prisoners of hope.  
Even today I declare  
[That] I will restore double to you.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Isaiah 42:6, 7**

"I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness,  
And will hold Your hand;  
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,  
As a light to the Gentiles,  
To open blind eyes,  
To bring out prisoners from the prison,  
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Isaiah 49:8-9**

Thus says the LORD:  
"In an acceptable time I have heard You,  
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;  
I will preserve You and give You  
As a covenant to the people,  
To restore the earth,  
To cause them to inherit the desolate heritages;  
That You may say to the prisoners, 'Go forth,'  
To those who [are] in darkness, 'Show yourselves.'  
"They shall feed along the roads,  
And their pastures [shall be] on all desolate heights.

It is interesting that, through the use of Hebrew poetry, Isaiah predicts the day will come when those who are imprisoned will be told to go forth into the presence of God and show themselves.

That Old Testament saints did not ascend immediately into the presence of God is also made apparent by the account of Saul and the medium of Endor. Notice that Samuel is not brought down from heaven, but comes up out of the earth. This, once again, demonstrates that Old Testament saints did not go into the presence of the Father; but, rather, were sequestered away, to a place of comfort, until the offering of Christ would put away sin.



<sup>NKJ</sup> **1 Samuel 28:13-16** And the king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What did you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I saw a spirit ascending out of the earth." So he said to her, "What *is* his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he *is* covered with a mantle." And Saul perceived that it *was* Samuel, and he stooped with *his* face to the ground and bowed down. Now Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am deeply distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God has departed from me and does not answer me anymore, neither by prophets nor by dreams. Therefore I have called you, that you may reveal to me what I should do." Then Samuel said: "Why then do you ask me, seeing the LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy?"

## **What powers were available to the Old Testament saint for knowing God?**

The Scriptures teach that it was the power of the word of God, apparently impacting the human conscience, that resulted in blessings to the Old Testament believer.

The human conscience was an imperfect recipient of the knowledge of the word of God. Nevertheless, as long as the conscience was regularly being kept in line by the word of God, the people were enabled to experience a limited walk with the Lord.

The conscience was the recipient of the teachings of the word of God before the life of the spirit was introduced into the experience of the saints.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Hebrews 9:9** It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the **conscience** -- <sup>10</sup> *concerned* only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. <sup>11</sup> But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. <sup>12</sup> Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your **conscience** from dead works to serve the living God? <sup>15</sup> And for this reason He is

the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.

Here, the phrase "pertaining to the conscience" gives us a hint as to what functioned in the heart of the Old Testament saint, enabling that saint to experience a degree of communion with God. This passage speaks of a worshipper not being complete in regard to the conscience; that is, the person was functioning before the Lord through the power of a quickened and compliant conscience.

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Psalm 1:1** Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, Nor stands in the path of sinners, Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; <sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night.

The Old Testament saint experienced edification through a vehicle which is not available to the saint today. Meditation upon the law of Moses by a receptive conscience produces an ability to experience a degree of communion with God. At this time that means of communion with God is not obsolete

<sup>NKJ</sup> **2 Corinthians 3:11** For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech -- <sup>13</sup> unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. <sup>NKJ</sup> **2 Corinthians 3:14** But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. <sup>15</sup> But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. <sup>16</sup> Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

**Hebrews 6:1** Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Romans 11:5** Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace. <sup>6</sup> And if by grace, then it is

no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if *it is* of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work. <sup>7</sup> What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were **blinded**. <sup>8</sup> Just as it is written: "God has given them a spirit of stupor, Eyes that they should not see And ears that they should not hear, To this very day." <sup>9</sup> And David says: "Let their table become a snare and a trap, A stumbling block and a recompense to them. <sup>10</sup> Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always." <sup>11</sup> I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not! But through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation *has come* to the Gentiles. <sup>12</sup> Now if their fall *is* riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! <sup>13</sup> For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, <sup>14</sup> if by any means I may provoke to jealousy *those who are* my flesh and save some of them.

The passage below is an account of an experience of King Saul. This was obviously a divine enablement. The Spirit came upon him (as the spirit commonly came upon Old Testament prophets) and apparently God gave him another heart, (which is not the same as the new man, which results from the new birth)

<sup>NKJ</sup> **1 Samuel 10:5-10** "After that you shall come to the hill of God where the Philistine garrison *is*. And it will happen, when you have come there to the city, that you will meet a group of prophets coming down from the high place with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them; and they will be prophesying. "Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you, and you will prophesy with them and be turned into another man. "And let it be, when these signs come to you, *that* you do as the occasion demands; for God *is* with you. "You shall go down before me to Gilgal; and surely I will come down to you to offer burnt offerings *and* make sacrifices of peace offerings. Seven days you shall wait, till I come to you and show you what you should do." So it was, when he had turned his back to go from Samuel, that God gave him another heart; and all those signs came to pass that day. When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them.

The bottom line is this: God the Father could not take complete possession of the saint, until Christ had purchased them with His own blood. The giving of the Spirit, and the giving of the new man, were possible only after all possible claims of sin upon the saint had been cancelled.