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Evidence of the Security of the Believer in the Old Testament

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The Old Testament has much to contribute to our understanding of the security of the believer. It offers three major lines of evidence for the perseverance of the saints. First, the Old Testament presents God as One whose character is such that he does not change, does not fail, and does not change his mind. Thus, those he has decided to save will be saved. Second, in the Old Testament, we see the pattern of God's acts in the salvation history of his people. These acts demonstrate who God is, the nature of the salvation he offers, and the pattern of the salvation of Israel as related to our salvation in Christ. God enables the believer to rest secure in the knowledge that once God has saved, his people are never destroyed. This applied to the people of God as a whole in the Old Testament; it applies to individuals in the New Covenant. Third, there are individual passages that strongly indicate that salvation is secure once given by God. This security is due not to anything within a person, but is due only to the love and covenant faithfulness of the God who delights to save.

Salvation Safeguarded, for Israel and for Individuals, by the Power of God

The first line of evidence for the security of believers is the nature of God and the salvation he gives. In the Old Testament, salvation carries the ideas of deliverance, liberation, and rescue. Salvation is God's deliverance of his people from a hopeless state to a state of wholeness and blessing. In God's acts of salvation in the Old Testament, one (or both) of two factors are present. Either there is deliverance from threat or suffering and protection from returning to the pre-deliverance state, or there is a new permanent relationship formed between God and those who were delivered. These factors entail God sustaining the salvation he has given. Salvation in the Old Testament is strongly connected to covenant. Protection from falling back to a pre-deliverance state is given or upheld in a covenant made by God. In some instances a new covenant is given, as after the flood and the Exodus. At other times, an older covenant is upheld, as at Israel's return from exile. In these covenants, there were explicit warnings about forbidden actions and their consequences, but those warnings did not involve losing the deliverance that was given. In the case of a new relationship being formed, a new permanent relationship with God is also protected by a covenant, as was the case with Israel after the Exodus. Israel was permanently made the people of God, and they have never lost that status. This protection of status was also the case with king David, who was saved from being killed

by Saul so that he could become king. David was set as the ruler of Israel, in a special relationship with God, and was promised that he or his descendants would never cease to hold that status. In the Old Testament, national salvation was emphasized, but this was not to the exclusion of individuals. “The Old Testament emphasizes the fact that the individual is part of the community more than the New Testament... Any conclusions which may be drawn from the Old Testament about the relation of the community to God must accordingly be applied with caution to the position of the individual under the new covenant” Thus, the salvation of the nation, and the perseverance of the same, can point us toward the perseverance of the saints in the New Covenant.

The Character of God the Savior

Salvation is secure because of who God is, not who we are. God loves those he saves with an everlasting love, he stays true to his words and decisions, and he upholds those he saves even when they fail. The nature of God’s everlasting love is revealed by Jeremiah’s prophecy of the New Covenant: God said, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.” His everlasting love to his people is the only thing that brings them security.

God also stays true to all things he has decided, whether part of a covenant or not. The psalmist says, “The counsel of the LORD stands forever, the plans of his heart to all generations.” Isaiah prophesied that God “declar[es] the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,'” In Ecclesiastes, the teacher corroborated, “perceiv[ing] that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him.” When God has decided to save, no one can thwart his plans. God does not change; he always acts according to his gracious nature. Even when God’s people fail, God shows his love as he upholds and restores them. As prophesied in the book of Malachi, “For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.” God does not let his people fall completely away. When they sin he brings them back to fellowship with himself. “Israel’s continued existence is due to God’s unchangeable love.” Israel deserved to be consumed, and yet God preserved them. All significant acts of salvation occurred solely by the actions and power of God. Only his salvation lasts and only his salvation means anything. Man cannot save. Jeremiah said to God, “Heal me, O LORD, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved, for you are my praise.” Jeremiah’s statement offers comfort in the durability of God’s actions. “If Yahweh will heal him, then he will indeed be healed. If Yahweh will save him, then he will indeed be saved. There is an underlying confidence in Yahweh here.”

God’s Covenant Faithfulness

God’s faithfulness to his covenant promises offers further hope that the believer may rest secure in God’s promise to save those who believe. Once God has made a covenant it can be trusted fully. God said through Isaiah, “‘For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed,’ says the LORD, who has compassion on you.” The world may fall away, but God will not forsake his covenant promises. “His hesed (love) as expressed in his covenant of peace is even more secure than the mountains and

the hills.” In the wilderness, God spoke of his covenant love to Israel through Moses, “For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.” This promise offered comfort to Israel during the Exodus, as well as nearly a millennium later in the Exile. “In exile the Israelites will once again seek Yahweh ... and when they do return unto Yahweh, they will find him to be a merciful God who will not forget the covenant with their fathers.” The covenant made with the patriarchs was never forgotten. God never fails in his covenant promises, so his promises to save those who believe in him will never be forsaken.

Security in Righteousness Which Depends on God

Righteousness is intimately tied to salvation. Salvation does not come apart from righteousness. The lasting nature of righteousness sheds further light on the security of the salvation of the believer. When God grants righteousness to people with whom he enters into relationship, it lasts, and is a sign of God’s work in those people.

However, many who question the eternal security of the believer often turn to passages in Ezekiel. Ezekiel wrote, “The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him when he transgresses ... if he trusts in his righteousness and does injustice, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in his injustice that he has done he shall die.” This may appear to indicate that the righteous will not necessarily be saved and live.

However, the person in question “trusts in his righteousness.” This is not trusting in God. One’s own righteousness has never been enough to save. Human righteousness is as filthy rags. In a person’s own power, it is possible to fall back into former sinful ways. Humans are not strong enough to withstand sin alone. Only God can keep people from turning away from Him. On the other hand, the book of Proverbs presents a different, more lasting sort of righteousness that has its origin in relationship with God, in the context of the following: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” When biblical proverbs discuss righteousness, it is in the context of those who fear the LORD. Righteous people are righteous because they fear and believe in God, not because of their own ability. Proverbs state that, “No one is established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous will never be moved.” and, “Whoever is wicked covets the spoil of evildoers, but the root of the righteous bears fruit.” and that “When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever.” These draw a picture of the righteous being grounded in the ways of God that keep one from falling away. Other wisdom literature presents the same idea. In the book of Job, it is written that the righteous will remain righteous: “Yet the righteous holds to his way, and he who has clean hands grows stronger and stronger.” Also, in the book of Psalms, it is written: “For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage; for justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it.” Righteousness that comes from God’s wisdom and provision, rather than from human effort, lasts.

Security in the Salvation from the Flood

The second line of evidence for the security of the believer is the pattern present in God’s acts of salvation in the Old Testament. The first such act of salvation was God saving humankind from the waters of the flood. Immediately afterward, God made a

covenant with Noah that there would never again be cause to worry about humankind's total destruction by water. The deliverance of the human race by means of Noah was guaranteed forever by a covenant God made with all people and creatures. God said, "I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." This covenant meant the salvation of mankind and the animals from the flood could never be lost, because there would never again be a flood. "The basic point of this covenant is that God gave assurance that what he agreed to do would be done." It is significant that "this covenant does not depend on human obedience to the laws given to Noah; rather, men's and women's compliance with the laws will allow them to live and enjoy this covenant." It is an unconditional promise that flood will never again threaten the lives of the whole human race. This specific salvation of mankind from the waters cannot be lost by any human action.

Security in the Salvation of the Exodus

The Exodus, the central act of salvation in the Old Testament, was prompted by God's remembering the covenant he made with Abraham. It looks forward to our salvation in Christ. "The liberation from Egypt functions as a type and anticipates the redemption that is ours in Jesus Christ." This deliverance was followed by the establishment of the covenant that guaranteed that Israel would remain God's people, and that He would be their God. David remarked on this much later: "And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people forever. And you, O LORD, became their God." The covenant with Israel after the Exodus stated that the people of Israel were subject to punishments for disobedience, but those punishments didn't involve returning to Egypt or to the bondage of slavery. Even as the Israelites were in the midst of God's great act of deliverance, they still didn't act as they should. They didn't trust God, and that was reason enough for God to let them perish. But he did not. The Psalmist records, "Our fathers, when they were in Egypt, did not consider your wondrous works; they did not remember the abundance of your steadfast love, but rebelled by the Sea, at the Red Sea. Yet he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make known his mighty power." God kept his word that he would save Israel. "The contrast between the loving acts of the Lord and Israel's lack of responsiveness dramatizes the greatness of God's love and salvation. He delivered a people who did not respond to his love!" The failures of imperfect people brought dire consequences upon them, but did not lead to their utter destruction or the loss of the great salvation God gave to them. We in the New Covenant hope not to emulate the mistakes to those in the desert who rebelled against God, but we can take comfort in knowing that God's salvation is not lost when we fail.

Security in the Salvation of Israel and David from Enemies and His New Status as King

The Davidic covenant shows God's pattern of forming a new relationship with a person or people and upholding that relationship unconditionally. In this covenant, God put someone in a special relationship with Himself, and there was a guarantee that the relationship would always be there. A good picture of this comes in 2 Samuel, where God says of David, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but

my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you.” Even when David sinned in taking Bathsheba and murdering Uriah, God did not dissolve his relationship with him. David or his descendants may falter, but God promised to restore them, and never to let his love depart. This covenant also points forward to our king in the line of David, the Messiah, in whom we have a permanent relationship to God.

Security in the Salvation from the Exile

If the Exodus was the central act of God’s salvation in the Old Testament, the return from Exile was the central act that showed the security of God’s acts of salvation. Judah experienced the defeat of their land and the loss of their place of worship. But the people of God never stopped being the people of God. God never did away with Israel as a people, but instead loved them and restored them after punishment and showed covenant faithfulness to that people. Israel’s wicked deeds and idolatry were the cause of the exile, but even the harshness of the exile didn’t end in the utter destruction of the people of God. Even after sinning and breaking their end of the Mosaic covenant, Israel retained their status as the people of God and didn’t return to bondage in Egypt.

God said through Ezekiel, referring to how he was going to restore Israel from the exile, “And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I deal with you for my name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD.” God had dealt with His people’s repeated idolatry by exiling them, but he showed his love by bringing them home.

The restoration from exile showed that God’s preservation of the salvation he gave was not due to anything Israel did to deserve it. “If Yahweh’s original election of his people had been unmerited, how much more would their restoration be. Despite a history of rebellion, Yahweh’s personal integrity and his jealous concern for his reputation triumph over his wrath.” Part of the reason for this security in their salvation was due to God’s valuing of his people, which was also unmerited. “Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life. Fear not, for I am with you ... whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” The return from exile was due to God’s unmerited favor, and his decision to value Israel and never to forsake them.

Security and Salvation in the New Covenant and the Coming of Messiah

In the Old Testament, passages that point towards salvation at the coming of the Messiah speak of a new sort of salvation, one that reaches into the very hearts of people and will never be lost. The images of the New Covenant, namely new hearts that remain faithful, the destruction of death, and everlasting salvation all show that the believer may rest completely secure God’s salvation. Jeremiah’s passage on the New Covenant spoke of God changing people’s hearts, so that they would always know him. Jeremiah prophesied, "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 ...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." God later said in the same book that in the future he would prevent

his people from falling away from him. “I will make with them an everlasting covenant, that I will not turn away from doing good to them. And I will put the fear of me in their hearts, that they may not turn from me.” In Isaiah, it is written, “Israel is saved by the LORD with everlasting salvation; you shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity.” The salvation that was to come with the Messiah was to be everlasting. “The prophet is insisting that that whatever may happen along the way, however we may suffer or be troubled, God will in the end deliver us – for all eternity.”

Ezekiel prophesied that, under the New Covenant, God’s people, “may walk in my statutes and keep my rules and obey them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.” The work of remaining faithful is empowered by God himself, and does not depend on human effort.

Other Evidence of the Security of the Believer: Individual Verses of Scripture

The third line of evidence for the security of the believer is the many other verses in the Old Testament which stand as evidence that salvation is secure. One example is in Psalms. David wrote, “For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.” A beautiful image presented in the books of Psalms and 2 Samuel is that of God setting someone securely in a safe mountain place, away from all enemies. “He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights.” Those God has chosen are given a secure place to stand. They are not in danger from enemies. Another image comes later in Psalms, where it is written, “The LORD will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O LORD, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” God is presented as the One who purposes something for his people, such as salvation, and he will not stop until the purpose is accomplished. These images help confirm our understanding of God’s salvation as secure.

Conclusion

The Old Testament offers much to our understanding of the security of the believer. God does not start something he doesn’t finish. Salvation is from God and not man, and because of the unchanging love and covenant faithfulness of God, salvation cannot be taken away from his people. In the history of God’s acts of salvation, there is a pattern of God saving a person or people, and then safeguarding what was gained, whether deliverance or relationship. There are also images present in the Old Testament of the security of the believer. These present evidence that the believer may rest secure in God’s salvation, since we know he will finish the great work he started for us.

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