

Old Testament Saints

A key problem for those who believe that baptism is essential are those who are saved without baptism. For example, the thief on the cross and the Old Testament Saint, to mention a few. The usual response from those who promote baptismal regeneration is to state that these are exceptions. Unfortunately, that ends up being an awfully large number of exceptions. Further, the fact that we have a significant number of all who are saved who have never been baptized alone proves that baptism is not essential for salvation.

The other problem comes when we look at the purpose of baptism in the Old testament. Most Christians are unaware that we baptism occurred in the Old Testament, but we do have reference baptisms referred to as ritual washings (mikvah). [A separate article is available on this site which deals specifically with the topic of the ritual washings and how they relate to baptism.](#)

For those who feel that salvation came through the Old Testament rituals, it is important to see what the book of Hebrews has to say regarding the prophetic nature of the mikvah in pointing to the death and resurrection of Christ. A separate article has been written on this topic. The primary focus of this topic will be to examine the means by which the Old Testament saints were saved.

John's baptism is a Jewish ritual just as circumcision is Jewish ritual. The rituals were symbolic and did not save.

Heb 10:11-14

11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

NKJV

This does not mean that the rituals were meaningless and without purpose – quite the contrary. The rituals were prophetic and were a symbolic witness of the cross of Christ where we do find salvation. There is only one act that saves and that is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross, and those who will believe upon Him and receive Him as Saviour are saved from their sin and restored to a right relationship with God, and no longer condemned by their sins.

John 3:14-19

14 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. 16 For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. 17 For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. 18 He who believes

in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.
NKJV

The rituals in the OT were prophetic of that which was to come. they did not save, but pointed to Him who would die for our sins. Likewise, baptism is as Paul indicates, symbolic of the death and resurrection of Christ and our partaking of it is symbolic of us being buried and raised with Him.

Scripture says that the law did not save anyone.

John 7:19
19 Did not Moses give you the law, yet none of you keeps the law?
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Rom 3:23-24
23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
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Rom 3:27-28
27 Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. 28 Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.
NKJV

Rom 4:1-5
4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. 3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. 5 But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,
NKJV

Rom 4:13
13 For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.
NKJV

That is because unless the law was obeyed perfectly, the law is the standard by which we are found to be guilty of sin, and sin, any sin, condemns us to hell since God cannot abide sin in His presence. Neither the thief on the cross nor the Old Testament saints were saved through the law.

There is no way to argue baptism being essential for salvation without creating two ways of

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salvation, which in effect denies the all sufficiency of the sacrifice on the cross. There is only one way to be saved and that is through the cross of Christ. None of perfectly kept the law, so none of us are saved under the law.

Rom 6:22-23

*23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
NKJV*

Rom 3:23-24

*23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,
NKJV*

Gal 3:21-25

*21 Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law. 22 But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. 23 But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. 24 Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. 25 But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.
NKJV*

Now, we know that everyone has broken at least part of the law, but even breaking part of the law makes us guilty of breaking all of the law.

James 2:10-11

*10 For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.
NKJV*

That being the case, obedience will not save. Thus even if there was any truth in baptism saving (which scripture fails to support), then it would not save in any case since failure to keep any part of the law means that obedience to any part of the law is futile for salvation. Thus our hope cannot be, in part or in whole in obedience, but solely in the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Once we claim that obedience is necessary, then man can boast in having done something to earn salvation, but scripture also speaks against that:

Eph 2:7-10

*8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.
NKJV*

Heb 10:4-6

4 For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.

*5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:
"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire,
But a body You have prepared for Me.
6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin
You had no pleasure.
NKJV*

Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins, so blood had to be shed. What blood was it that was shed that was able to pay the price for the sins of Abraham or any Old Testament saint or the thief on the cross?

*Heb 11:13-14
13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off
were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims
on the earth.
NKJV*

They died in faith, not saved by the faith, because they had not received the promise, but they looked forward to the promise. What promise could it be that one could look forward to in Abraham's time which might bring about salvation through remission of sins? The way of salvation of Abraham would be the same as that of Moses, since so many who believe that baptism is essential believe that the thief was under the law of Moses and therefore somehow saved by a different means than those after Christ. How then was Moses saved?

*Heb 11:24-27
24 By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's
daughter, 25 choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the
passing pleasures of sin, 26 esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the
treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.
NKJV*

He also looked forward to the reward, the same reward as Abraham, the reward of salvation through the cross of Christ. Notice the last verse of Hebrews 11 where it speaks of the faith of Abraham:

*Heb 11:38-40
39 And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the
promise, 40 God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made
perfect apart from us.
NKJV*

They had faith, but did not receive the promise, but yet they were saved because of their faith in Christ who was promised and was to come. No, it was not faith in and of itself that saved them, but specifically their faith in Christ, the salvation which came through the shedding of blood on the

cross.

It is important to note that scripture does not provide for any different means of salvation for anyone but the cross. Our need for the salvation comes as a result of separation from God caused by sin:

Isa 59:2
2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
And your sins have hidden His face from you,
So that He will not hear.
NKJV

The only way that our sins can be forgiven is by the sacrifice on the cross. All salvation is through the cross. The Old Testament saints were saved through the cross, and not one of them was saved through baptism. There is, and ever was only one way of salvation - the blood which Jesus sacrificed on the cross for payment of our sins.

1 Peter 1:20-21
20 He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you 21 who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.
NKJV

We must not make the mistake of assuming that God is limited by space and time. He isn't. The sacrifice on the cross covered the sins of all, both those before the cross and afterward.

Rev 13:7-8
8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.
NKJV

The only means of salvation for anyone, ever, has been the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross.

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