

Eternal Security / Once Saved Always Saved / Perseverance of the Saints

I received this question from someone via an email years ago, and I wrote out the following to offer a biblically based answer.

His question was: Can you help me with the concept of Once Saved Always Saved? I feel it is not in line with the Torah nor in line with Yeshua's teachings. Can you point me to any resources to help me refute this?

Actually, "once saved always saved" is but one way of describing what the Bible teaches about the salvation of those God chooses to be His. In the Tanach, Israel is given as a paradigm of salvation, i.e., that Israel is "redeemed" from slavery in Egypt and brought safely to the Land of promise, i.e., Israel. While this is a "temporal" salvation, it is nonetheless the paradigm upon which eternal salvation is explained in the Scriptures. For instance, Paul writes in Col 1:13-14, "For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Paul uses "exodus imagery" to express our eternal salvation. Now, did Israel deserve God's steadfast love by which they were taken from Egypt and brought through the wilderness to the Land of Promise? No, of course not. Why didn't God abandon Israel when they made the golden calf and rebelled against Him? Because Moses, acting as mediator, interceded on their behalf, and because God acted in faithfulness to His covenant promises, which He had made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

If we take the exodus as a primary paradigmatic revelation of God's method of saving sinners eternally, then we understand a statement such as made by HaShem in Jer 32:40 (a passage which builds upon the New Covenant revelation in Jer 31:31-34) – "I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; and I will put the fear of Me in their hearts so that they will not turn away from Me." Here, when God puts "the fear of Me" in their hearts, they remain faithful to Him. This is a reiteration of the New Covenant text just a chapter earlier, where the bold statement is made about those whose hearts are made new, given a new spirit, and who have the Torah written upon their heart: "...for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." How is it possible that God could say "their sin I will remember no more?" If He has forever wiped away their sin, then is this not clear language that they are forever secure in His grace and salvation?

When we come to the Apostolic Scriptures, we have this doctrine fleshed out completely. Yeshua's parable of the one lost sheep teaches us what? The Shepherd is the One Who secures the salvation of each individual. So if one can "lose their salvation," this is a slap in the face of the Shepherd Who is unable to accomplish His shepherding properly, for He loses a sheep that belongs to Him. Moreover, did He pay the price of redemption for those who would be saved? Does anyone really think that having paid such a high price, He would allow the enemy to snatch what is rightfully His away from His hand? No, He states plainly, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand." (John 10:27-28).

Paul's teaching reiterates this wonderful reality over and over again. His "golden chain" of redemption in Rom 8:29-30, "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." The Greek text is very emphatic here. It is very clear that each group mentioned is precisely the group next mentioned, without any one being lost: all those predestined are precisely those who are conformed to the image of His Son; all who are predestined are precisely those who are called; all who are called are exactly the same ones He justifies; all those He justifies are the same ones He glorified. And note that even the word "glorified" is put in the aorist (past) tense! Our glorification, i.e., our obtaining a place in the world to come, is just as sure as is our being predestined, our being called, our being conformed to the image of Yeshua, and our being justified. So here, we could well say that Paul teaches: "once justified, always justified."

I've noted just a few texts, but there are literally hundreds more. Those who stand against this clear and obvi-

ous doctrine do so (more often than not) because they also believe salvation is partly what mankind contributes: God does His part, man does his part, and together they accomplish salvation. If man is, to one extent or another, the one who accomplishes his personal salvation, then it stands to reason that he could likewise “undo” what he has made. But the Scriptures speak differently. Just as Israel was entirely unable to effect their own exodus from Egypt, so the sinner is entirely unable to effect his eternal salvation, or to find any way on his own to stand righteous before God. In fact, the Bible commonly portrays salvation by three metaphors: creation, birth, resurrection. God speaks of creating Israel for Himself, of giving birth to Israel and even nursing Israel as a babe, and Ezekiel’s vision of the dry bones is the picture of resurrection. The same metaphors are used of individual salvation: a saved individual is “born again,” “a new creation,” one who died with Messiah and “raised with Him to newness of life.” What do these three metaphors have in common? That they must be accomplished by someone other than the person himself: no one can create himself; no one can birth himself; and no one can resurrect himself. Since we were dead in our trespasses and sins, our salvation must necessarily have come about through God’s own sovereign and gracious action toward us. In fact, Paul states that grace was given to us in Messiah Yeshua before the world even began (2Tim 1:9)!

The assurance of God’s sovereign work, by which He will eternally save a host of people that no one can number, from every tribe, kindred and tongue, is substantiated throughout the Scriptures, and is one of the most prized possessions of everyone Who is born from above.

Furthermore, the proof that a person has been chosen unto salvation, has been gifted by faith to believe and to receive the gift of His grace by faith in the saving work of Yeshua, is that there is an increasingly evident “fruit of righteousness” in his or her life. As an illustration: we know that an apple tree is “alive” when it brings forth apples. Yeshua taught this in Matt 7:15–20, “You will know them by their fruits.” He also taught:

Yeshua said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (Jn 6:35–37)

What what does Yeshua mean by “all that the Father gives Me”? Note what Paul writes in Eph 1.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua Messiah, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Messiah, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Yeshua Messiah to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. (Eph 1:3–6)

What a wonderful and glorious truth, displaying the sovereign, elective love of God! Before the worlds were created, God, in His all-powerful and all-knowing deity, chose a host of people to be His and predestined everything necessary to bring them to faith in the Messiah Yeshua resulting in eternal life with Him. This is what Yeshua means by the phrase “all that the Father gives Me.” In these words He affirms the eternal intent of the Father to save a host of people beyond number, and all those He has predestined unto eternal salvation are “given to Yeshua,” which means “give to Him in order that He would pay the price of their redemption and would therefore secure their eternal salvation.” Surely this eternal salvation is a relational reality, for by His grace each one who is saved cooperates with the Ruach HaKodesh in coming to exercise the faith they have been given by repenting of their sin and place their faith in Yeshua. But in reality, all of this results from God having gifted those He has chosen with the ability and the desire to seek His forgiveness and to possess His gift of salvation.

Paul also makes this clear in his epistle to the Ephesians:

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph 2:8–9)

What does Paul mean by writing: “and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God”? What does the word “that” refer to?

...and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – The real issue in understanding Paul’s meaning in this phrase is the demonstrative “that” (τοῦτο, *touto* < οὗτος, *houtos*). In Greek, a demonstrative must agree in gender with the word it modifies. So when we begin to ask what is “not of yourselves,” we obviously look in the preceding context to find the answer. The word “grace” in the Greek is feminine gender, and the word “faith” in the Greek is also feminine. However, the demonstrative “that” is in the neuter gender. The best explanation of Paul’s words here is that the neuter demonstrative can be used to refer back to an entire clause or to the previous context in general. [cf. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, pp. 334–35]

Further, in the English translation of “it is the gift of God,” the English words “it is” are not actually written in the Greek but, as often, are expected to be supplied as an ellipsis. If we were to translate the entire verse woodenly it would be: “For by the grace you have been saved through faith, and this not of you, the gift of God.”

Thus, the best understanding of the grammar is this: Paul is stating that the cause of our salvation is the grace of God and that we receive His salvation by faith, and neither His grace nor our faith is something which begins with ourselves. Both His grace as well as the faith to receive His gracious offer of salvation are gifts which He gives. (quoted from my Ephesians Commentary)

Note also these texts:

All who dwell on the earth will worship him [i.e, the beast/anti-Messiah], everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. (Rev 13:8)

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come. (Rev 17:8)

Note the emphasis, once again, of God choosing those who would be saved, and doing so “from the foundation of the world,” i.e., before His sovereign act of actually creating the universe.

We see similar language used by Paul in Romans 9:11–13 when he writes about God’s sovereign, divine election of Jacob:

...for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, “THE OLDER WILL SERVE THE YOUNGER.” [Gen 25:3] Just as it is written, “JACOB I LOVED, BUT ESAU I HATED.” [Mal 1:2f]

Note these other texts as well:

Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who justifies; (Rom 8:33)

So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (Col 3:12)

But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. (2Thess 2:13)

For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Messiah Yeshua and with it eternal glory. (2Tim. 2:10)

In similar, direct language, Luke gives us a clear insight into the theology of the Apostles when he records the events surrounding the work of Paul and Barnabas in Pisidian Antioch. Having given witness of Yeshua in the local synagogue on Shabbat, the people begged them to return the next Shabbat and provide more teaching. The next week nearly the whole town showed up for Shabbat service, something that irritated the Jewish leaders who were jealous of all the attention Paul and Barnabas were receiving. So when the Apostles began their teaching, the Jewish leaders did all in their power to contradict the message of the Gospel, and even resorted to blasphemy (Acts 13:45). Given the recalcitrant attitude of the synagogue leaders, and the fact that the Apostles had followed the command of Yeshua to go first to the lost sheep of Israel, Paul publicly announced that they would henceforth turn to the Gentiles in their mission of proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom. Then Luke gives us this notice:

When the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed. (Acts 13:48)

Note carefully the order in which Luke states the case. He does not write “and as many as believed were appointed to eternal life,” making their response to the message the deciding factor. Rather, Luke makes it clear that the cause of their believing was their having been appointed to eternal life—“and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” For Luke and the Apostles who were his companions, the divine initiative in choosing those who would be saved is what secures their acceptance of the Gospel message by faith. They believe because they were appointed to eternal life, not *visa versa*.

Thus, if the Almighty appoints all those He has chosen to eternal life with Him, this makes it very clear that all who are of the elect will, through God’s sovereign power and the gift of faith, come to faith in Yeshua and will, by God’s power and grace, persevere in that saving faith resulting in eternal life with God and with all whom He has redeemed unto Himself.