

# 6

## *God's Redeemed People*

Most of the Old Testament is filled with records of the history of the Israelites. First God rescued them, redeeming them from the Egyptians and making them part of His family. Then He restored them, giving them an inheritance in the Promised Land. God's actions on the Israelites' behalf were necessary steps in His plan of salvation. At the same time, these steps illustrate the two aspects of His plan of salvation, showing how His similar purposes for the rest of mankind will be accomplished.

In review, the initial chapters of Genesis reveal God's purpose for mankind: man is to be God's offspring, part of His royal family who will rule over the rest of creation. When Adam fails to obey God's command, he proves himself disloyal to his heavenly Father. Consequently, man is condemned to death and falls under the dominion of Satan. Man's condition is desperate: he needs someone to rescue him from Satan's power and from sin's bondage and devastation. Man needs to be redeemed.

Even though mankind has fallen into sin, God still desires to accomplish His purpose for mankind. Therefore, God communicated the gospel to mankind, indicating that He has a plan of salvation through which He promises to rescue mankind from sin and to restore His blessings to mankind.

Twenty centuries after God proclaimed the proto-gospel to Adam, God promises Abraham that his “Seed” will bless all the families of Earth. This gospel promise to Abraham confirms the fact that both Jews and Gentiles can be justified (Gen 3:15; reaffirmed in Gal 3:8). Abraham becomes the prime example demonstrating justification by faith—God justifies and reconciles those who believe His gospel. Years later, Abraham’s testing demonstrates justification by works—God rewards those who obey His will (commands).

Since Abraham’s descendants are included in some of God’s promises to Abraham, the Israelites will play an important part in God’s plan of salvation. The Israelites become prime examples illustrating “redemption” and “inheritance,” chief features of the two aspects of God’s plan of salvation. This chapter will focus mainly on the first: God’s redemption of His people, rescuing them from bondage. The next chapter will focus mainly on the second: God’s inheritance for His chosen people, restoring and rewarding those who do His will.

God advises New Testament believers to learn from the examples of the Israelites (1Cor 10:1-13; Heb 3:7-19; 11:1-40). The biblical principle of redemption, illustrated by the Israelites, is applicable to everyone who is in bondage to sin and needs the Messiah to rescue him.

### **Israelites in Bondage**

The curse of sin includes the penalty that man would have to raise his food by the sweat of his brow (Gen 3:17-19). Famines and lack of food are consequences resulting from the curse of sin. During a severe famine, the sons of Israel travel to Egypt to buy food (Gen 42-47). They eventually move to Egypt and, over time, become enslaved by Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In bondage, the Israelite slaves are afflicted with heavy burdens and forced to build Egyptian treasure cities (Ex 1:11-14).

Pharaoh is a worldly ruler lusting after power and riches, he is an adversary of God and holds the Israelites in bondage. He illustrates the biblical concept of the “seed of the serpent” (Gen 3:15).

As slaves, the Israelites illustrate the biblical concept of mankind being in bondage (see Fig. 6.1), held captive by sin and oppressed by Satan, the evil ruler who has dominion over this world.

God had warned Abraham that his descendants would suffer in Egypt for 400 years, but He had also promised to judge Egypt for afflicting them and to restore the Israelites to the Promised Land (Gen 15:13-14).

So, after 400 years, God hears the Israelites' cries because of their affliction and remembers the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God looks upon the Israelites and acknowledges that, as descendants of Abraham, they are included in some of His covenant promises to Abraham (Ex 2:23-24).

### God Calls the Israelites

God takes the initiative. Setting in motion His plan to rescue the Israelites from their bondage to the Egyptians, He calls the Israelites to inform them of His plans to redeem them from slavery and to restore them to the Promised Land.

First, God finds Moses, who has been living in the land of Midian, out of Pharaoh's reach. God appoints Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, telling him about His plan to "deliver"<sup>1</sup> the Israelites—how He will "snatch them out of Pharaoh's hand" (Ex 3:8; cf. 3:6-22). Moses initially objects to God's plan, making excuses why he should not be appointed their leader, but he finally agrees to do as God commands (Ex 4:1-17).

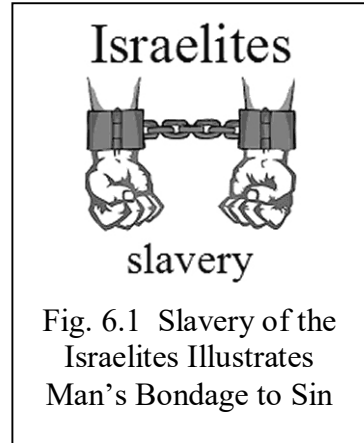


Fig. 6.1 Slavery of the Israelites Illustrates Man's Bondage to Sin

<sup>1</sup> In Ex 3:8, the Hebrew word *natsal*, which is often translated "deliver," "recover," or "rescue," means "to snatch (a possession) out of someone's hand" (see Gen 31:9, 16; 32:11; 37:21-22; Ex 2:19; 3:8, 22; 5:23; 6:6; 12:27).

On the way back to Egypt, Moses meets his brother Aaron, who will act as his spokesman. “So Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD who had sent him, and all the signs which He had commanded him” (Ex 4:28). When the two brothers arrive in Egypt, they gather together the elders and the Israelites. With everyone assembled, “Aaron spoke all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses. Then he did the signs in the sight of the people” (Ex 4:30).

What specifically is included in God’s call of the Israelites? God’s call consists of the good news which He has commissioned Moses to tell them (see Fig. 6.2). This good news includes three details.

First, God identifies Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, telling the Israelites that He has seen their affliction and has heard their cries in their bondage (Ex 3:6).

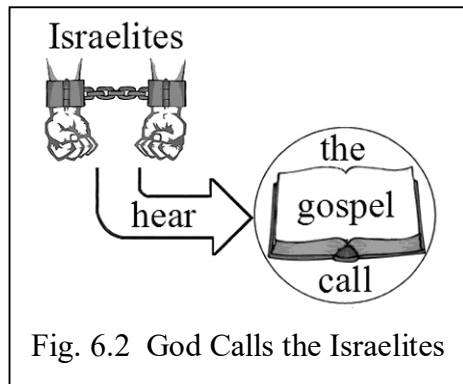


Fig. 6.2 God Calls the Israelites

Second, as He had promised to their father Abraham, God promises to rescue them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to restore them to the Promised Land (Ex 3:7-10).

Third, God promises that, after leading them out of Egypt, they “shall serve God on this mountain” (Ex 3:12). God calls the Israelites, just as He called Abraham, for the purpose of serving Him (in His Kingdom). Initially, they are to travel three days into the wilderness and make sacrifices to Him; eventually, they are to serve Him in the Promised Land.

### **Israelites Believe God**

How do the Israelites respond after they hear “all the words which the LORD had spoken to Moses” (Ex 4:30)?

So the people believed; and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel and that He had looked on

their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped (Ex 4:31).

Their response is to believe God; they believe that His word of promise is true, and then they worship Him. Although many believed at the same time,<sup>2</sup> belief is a personal, individual response. Whenever an individual believes God's gospel, he is justified by faith.

Remember the example of Abraham's belief in his justification by faith? When Abraham believed God, God accredited righteousness to his individual account, justifying him before God. Specifically, Abraham's name was written in God's register and a credit of righteousness was written after Abraham's name. This gift of righteousness provided him with a righteous standing before God.

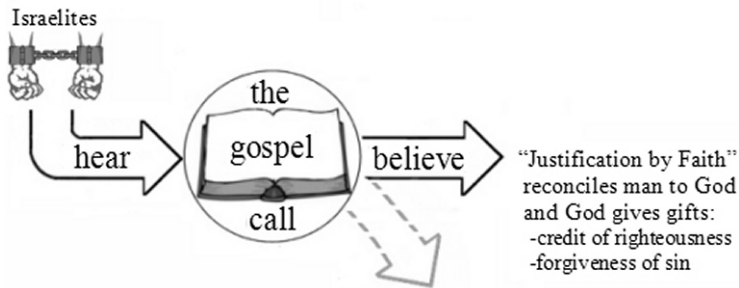


Fig. 6.3 Israelites Believe and are Justified by Faith

Paul explains that, just as this principle of justification by faith was true for Abraham, it is also true for anyone who walks in Abraham's steps of faith (Rom 4:1-12). Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that at the moment that one of these Israelites hears God's promise reported by Moses and Aaron and believes, he is justified by faith,<sup>3</sup> having his name written in God's book, a gift of righteousness accredited to his individual account, and his sins forgiven (see Fig. 6.3).

<sup>2</sup> In Acts 2:41 and 4:4, thousands of people believed at the same time.

<sup>3</sup> Although certainly many Israelites were already believers, this passage is mostly for the readers' benefit, so that no one needs to wonder whether or not these Israelite believers have been justified by faith.

As with Abraham, the justification by faith of an Israelite believer is not based on obedience to God's commands. As yet, there has not been an opportunity to obey, since Moses has just told them what God has promised to do for them. They have not yet gone out of Egypt to go to the Promised Land, neither have they gone to inform Pharaoh that they are going to serve God. Furthermore, they are not being rewarded for obeying the Old Covenant Law, since it has not yet been delivered to them. Thus, their justification by faith is not a reward for any good works they have done; it is not a reward for obedience to the Old Law, it is not even for good works they might do in the future. In their justification by faith, the credit of righteousness which reconciles each individual to God is a gift—the gift God gives to every believer simply because he believes God's promise of salvation.

### **God Redeems the Israelites**

When God tells Moses about His plan to rescue the Israelites from their bondage in Egypt, He describes His action as “redemption.” God will “redeem” the Israelites by “rescu[ing them] from their bondage” (Ex 6:6), “snatching them out of the hand of the Egyptians” (Ex 3:8; 18:8-10). Since the Israelites are slaves, mere possessions in the hands of Pharaoh, God must ransom them from the Egyptians to make them His possession. The redemption of the Israelites illustrates how God repurchases all who believe His promise from their slavemaster, sin.

Human enslavement of other human beings is an ancient practice.<sup>4</sup> The word “redeem” does not mean as much to

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<sup>4</sup> Slavery and slave redemption are still practiced in parts of the modern world. In 1989 in Sudan, when the National Islamic Front took control of the government in Khartoum, they armed the Muslim Baggara tribesmen to fight the poorly-educated (mostly Christian) tribes in southern Sudan. The Baggara have a long history of enslaving the Dinkas. Rearmed and aided by the Khartoum government, the Baggara resumed slave trading, raiding and capturing thousands of Dinka men, women, and children. In the 1990's, the Sudanese government

modern readers as it did to ancient people. Generally, to “redeem” means to recover from another something of value. Today, for the most part, the only things Americans redeem are coupons at the grocery store; however, slaves are still being kidnapped and sold today.



Fig. 6.4 “A Slave Gang in Zanzibar”<sup>5</sup>

Imagine that your relative has been kidnapped and is being held hostage. If you are his redeemer, you must bring money in order to ransom him from his captors. Recently, in Sudan, it has been necessary for redeemers to go to a slave market to recover (buy back) someone being sold by the slave traders. This is close to the meaning of “redeem” which God applies to the Israelites.

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permitted slave markets to re-open in Khartoum and Juba, where slaves were sold for as little as \$15 each and branded with the Arabic name of their new owner. Although “slave redemption” was possible, family members who came to buy back their relatives risked their own enslavement by the Muslim slave traders. Once well-meaning Western relief organizations became involved, buying slaves to free them, their efforts resulted in inflating the price to over \$50 per slave, making the slave trade even more profitable. Many of these atrocities have been somewhat curtailed since South Sudan gained its independence in 2011.

<sup>5</sup> Illustration of an Arab slave trader taking his captured slaves to market, from *The Illustrated London News* (Mar 16, 1889), vol. 94, 343.

God promises to redeem the Israelites from their slavery out of the hands of the Egyptians, so God begins negotiations with Pharaoh for the release of the Israelites.

God directs Moses to start by explaining His will to Pharaoh, warning him of the terrible consequences which will occur if he does not obey God's command:

You shall say to Pharaoh, "Thus says the LORD: 'Israel is My son, My firstborn. So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn'" (Ex 4:22-23).

God has stated His terms for the redemption of the Israelites. Pharaoh refuses to listen and ignores God's command to release the children of Israel. Instead of taking God's warning seriously, Pharaoh responds by increasing the Israelites' hardship and adding to their misery, further exposing his insatiable greed and selfishness.

Hence, God increases pressure on Pharaoh and the Egyptians in order to convince them to let the Israelites go. God sends ten plagues as signs, and also as judgments, in order to persuade Pharaoh and the Egyptians. In doing so, God displays His awesome power, demonstrating that He is greater than the false gods which the Egyptians worship. Nevertheless, Pharaoh refuses to obey God and does not let the Israelites go to serve Him.

God already knew that Pharaoh's sinful heart was stubborn ("hard") and had told the Israelites that "great judgments" would be necessary to rescue them and make them His people:

I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God (Ex 6:6-7).

### **Redemption**

-to buy a relative back from the slave market or pay a ransom in order to rescue a relative from a kidnapper.



## **God Institutes the Passover**

The ten plagues become increasingly worse. At one point, Pharaoh begins to vacillate and considers giving in to God's command to let the Israelites go. In the end, he acts selfishly and keeps them in bondage. Coinciding with the tenth and final plague, the celebration of the first Passover is the climax of this drama. Passover night is memorialized in Israel's history, because on this night God redeems the Israelites, rescuing them from the oppressive hand of the Egyptians. For the Israelites, God's salvation frees them from slavery, brings victory over their enemies, and eventually, provides an inheritance in the Promised Land.

The Israelites are instructed to hold the Passover feast during the night. Each household is to sacrifice a lamb and paint the lamb's blood on the doorpost and lintel of the house. During the night, those who stay inside that house will not suffer any harm from the destroyer who will "pass over" them. Otherwise, the destroyer will enter any household which does not have lamb's blood on its door and will kill the firstborn of that family.

The Israelites obey God's instructions and, as He promised, those with blood on their doors are protected from the power of the destroyer. On the other hand, the Egyptians do not sacrifice a lamb or paint its blood on their doors; thus, they suffer the vengeance of the destroyer who kills their firstborn sons.

Finally, after his firstborn son is killed during the tenth plague, Pharaoh relents and gives in to God's command. "Then he called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, 'Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. And go, serve the LORD as you have said'" (Ex 12:31).

Consider this, if Pharaoh had obeyed God earlier and let the Israelites go, the Passover sacrifice could have been made in another land, far enough away (three days journey) so that no Egyptian would have suffered the loss of his firstborn. The stubborn heart of Pharaoh would not allow the Israelites to go out of the land for their sacrifice to God. Therefore, Pharaoh is

to blame for all the negative consequences, especially for all the deaths resulting from his disobedience to God's command.

### **Song of the Redeemed**

Now that the Israelites have been redeemed, Moses leads them out of Egypt. Suddenly, Pharaoh changes his mind and sends the Egyptian army to pursue them, but God protects His family, the children of Israel, by destroying the army in the Red Sea. After the Israelites see God's salvation and His "glorious triumph" over His adversaries, they sing the "Song of Salvation":

I will sing to the LORD,  
 For He has triumphed gloriously!  
 The horse and its rider  
 He has thrown into the sea!  
 The LORD *is* my strength and song,  
 And He has become my salvation;  
 He *is* my God, and I will praise Him;  
 My father's God, and I will exalt Him.  
 The LORD *is* a man of war;  
 The LORD *is* His name.  
 Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea;  
 His chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea.  
 The depths have covered them;  
 They sank to the bottom like a stone.

....

You in Your mercy have led forth  
 The people whom You have redeemed;  
 You have guided them in Your strength  
 To Your holy habitation.

....

All the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away.  
 Fear and dread will fall on them;  
 By the greatness of Your arm  
 They will be as still as a stone,  
 Till Your people pass over, O LORD,  
 Till the people pass over  
 Whom You have purchased.  
 You will bring them in and plant them

In the mountain of Your inheritance,  
In the place, O LORD, which You have made  
For Your own dwelling,  
The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established.  
The LORD shall reign forever and ever (Ex 15:1-18).

The “Song of Salvation” (Ex 15:1-18) which the redeemed Israelites sing mentions several important themes related to salvation. These themes reinforce the concepts of rescue and restoration:

- 1) God’s triumph over the adversary;
- 2) His purchase of His people;
- 3) His rescue of His redeemed people;
- 4) His guiding them to His dwelling place;
- 5) His establishing them in His inheritance; and
- 6) His dwelling place, where He will reign forever.

### *God's Salvation of the Israelites*

When God called the Israelites, first He identified Himself as the God of their fathers. Then He promised to rescue (“snatch”) them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to restore them to the Promised Land. Finally, God affirmed the purpose of His call—they were to serve Him (Ex 3:6-18). God’s promise of salvation to the Israelites included both aspects of His plan of salvation for mankind (see Fig 3.3, p. 37). Their salvation was not just their rescue from the hand of the Egyptian Pharaoh (representing the seed of the serpent); it was also a promise to restore them to the land of their fathers, “a land flowing with milk and honey,” reminiscent of the Garden of Eden (Ex 3:8).

“Salvation” is a concept which has been made muddy by centuries of manipulation by human theology and tradition. To retrieve the essential biblical definition of being “saved” it is helpful to consider the earliest occurrences of this concept in Scripture.

In the Bible, the first instance of the Hebrew noun *yěshuw’ah* (“salvation”) occurs in Jacob’s blessing and prophecy concerning his sons (Gen 49:18, see discussion on p.

34-35). As Jacob is dying, he is contemplating the coming Messiah who will rescue mankind from his adversaries, and he exclaims that he is still waiting for God's "salvation" to come.

In the Bible, the first instance of the Hebrew verb *yasha'* ("to save") occurs when Moses rescues some shepherd girls (the daughters of Jethro, the Midian priest), "saving" them from their adversaries, the local shepherds who keep driving their flocks away from the water (Ex 2:17).

The next instances of these Hebrew words ("salvation" and "to save") occur during the narrative of the Exodus, when the Israelites are fleeing from Pharaoh. These words convey the idea of rescue when Moses addresses the Israelites who are trapped between the Egyptian army and the Red Sea:

Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever. The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace (Ex 14:13-14).

So the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore (Ex 14:30).

God divides the Red Sea and the Israelites cross on dry ground. However, when the Egyptian army tries to follow after them, God releases the waters and drowns these adversaries. Thus, God fights on behalf of the Israelites and saves them, rescuing them from the pursuing Egyptians.

Another good illustration of the general idea of salvation is provided in the Law of Moses. It describes the circumstances when a rapist molests a betrothed maiden in a field and "there is none to save her" (Dt 22:27). In each of these passages, the biblical concept of salvation has a common, every-day meaning and is not invested with a "spiritualized" meaning.

### **Salvation**

-to give width or breadth; to rescue or liberate from affliction, or in battle having victory over an enemy. Essentially, it means to recover what was lost and set things right as they ought to be.

After God saves the Israelites from their oppressors, they sing: “[The LORD] has become my salvation” (Ex 15:2). Singing about their salvation, they express joy that God has triumphed by rescuing them, keeping His promise to snatch them out of the hand of the Egyptians (Ex 14:30).

### *God's Redemption of the Israelites*

The “Song of Salvation” also mentions God’s redemption of the Israelites, describing them as “the people . . . whom You have purchased” (Ex 15:16). In the song, God’s act of redemption is also described in terms of His leading. At times, this word “leading” describes troops who are “led forth” to battle (1Ki 10:26; 2Ki 18:11), but in this context, the idea seems to be more that God “leads [them] back,” in the sense of restoring them to the Promised Land. Thus, this idea of God “leading the redeemed” is set in parallel to God “guiding them . . . to His holy habitation” (Ex 15:13).

Just as He had promised, God has freed the redeemed Israelites from their bondage in Egypt in order to return them to their fathers’ homeland, described as the “holy habitation” of their heavenly Father (Ex 4:22). This idea is very much in keeping with the gospel’s good news for all mankind: God’s purpose for rescuing us from sin’s bondage is to restore us, so that we can enjoy the fellowship of our Father-Creator in His house.

### *God's Inheritance for the Israelites*

The Israelites are also singing about inheriting God’s inheritance, specifically, the Promised Land (cf. Isa 8:8-10).

Till the people pass over  
Whom You have purchased.  
You will bring them in and plant them  
In the mountain of Your inheritance, (Ex 15:16-17).

Although at this time their possession of the Promised Land is still in the future, they understand that God intends for them to inherit it. Why? God has made them heirs of the Promised

Land, not because of their own righteousness (Dt 9:4-6), nor because of the Old Covenant (Gal 3:15-18), but because God promised Abraham that his descendants would inherit the Promised Land (Gen 15:18-21; 17:7-8). Becoming an heir of God's inheritance is a gift granted to children of Abraham because they are believers and thus have become part of the family of God.

God promises to establish the Israelites in His inheritance. Just as the Egyptian army became like a stone and sank to the bottom of the Red Sea (Ex 15:5), the inhabitants of Canaan will not be able to stand against the Israelites because "[they] will melt away; fear and trembling will fall on them" (Ex 15:15-16).

Earlier in the "Song of Salvation," the Israelites were described as being rescued, redeemed, and set free. They had been bought from the slave market in Egypt; they are "the people . . . whom [God] has purchased." Now, as they sing the theme of being "brought out" of Egypt, they describe where God will "bring" them and the inheritance they will "enter into." Thus, the themes of rescue and redemption from Egypt are complemented by the themes of restoration and inheritance in the Promised Land. As God planted Adam in the Garden of Eden, He will "plant" His redeemed people in His city, described above as "the mountain of [His] inheritance."

### *God's Dwelling Among the Israelites*

The "Song of Salvation" describes something new, an idea not specifically included in the previous gospel messages found in Genesis: God is going to dwell with His people.

In the place, O LORD, which You have made  
For Your own dwelling,  
The sanctuary, O LORD, which Your hands have established.  
The LORD shall reign forever and ever (Ex 15:17-18).

This new promise of privilege is especially reminiscent of God walking with man in the Garden of Eden and goes hand in hand with God's promise to make the Israelites His family:

I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God (Ex 6:6-7).

God's promise to take them as His people and be their God means that, as a man provides for his wife, God will be a husband who provides for the Israelites (cf. Jer 31:32). He will dwell with them, and they will dwell with Him. They are to become God's "special treasure" (Ex 19:5), His personal inheritance (Dt 4:20; 32:9).

After the Israelites finish singing the "Song of Salvation" to God, the Israelite women continue their celebration, singing and dancing for joy.

The news of God's mighty triumph over His adversaries in Egypt is soon heard in the surrounding nations. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, hears the good news and comes to celebrate God's salvation of the Israelites: "[Jethro] rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians" (Ex 18:9).



Fig. 6.5 Main Features of Rescue in God's Plan of Salvation

Redemption is a main feature in the first aspect of God's plan of salvation (see Fig. 6.5). God's redemption of the Israelites illustrates His redemption of all His people. Jesus Christ came "to give His life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28). Through Christ, God has provided everlasting redemption, making it available for all mankind, so that anyone who believes His gospel can be saved, rescued from the adversaries of sin, death, and Satan (Heb 9:12; 1Pet 1:18-19).

Our Lord Jesus Christ, gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works (Titus 2:13-14).

God's purpose in redeeming New Testament believers from sin is similar to His purpose for redeeming the Israelites: to create "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people" (1Pet 2:9). In fact, all who are "the children of the promise" (even New Testament believers) are counted as children of Abraham (Rom 9:8) and are therefore heirs of God's promises to Abraham's descendants (see Fig. 6.5). Like Abraham, we are heirs of a future inheritance in the New Jerusalem.

God promised Jeremiah that a great day would come when He would gather His redeemed people from among all nations. Jeremiah prophesies that this "new" Exodus<sup>6</sup> will supersede the memory of the "first" Exodus from Egypt:

"Therefore, behold, the days are coming," says the LORD, "that they shall no longer say, 'As the LORD lives who brought up the children of Israel from the land of Egypt,' but, 'As the LORD lives who brought up and led the descendants of the house of Israel from the north country and from all the countries where I had driven them.' And they shall dwell in their own land" (Jer 23:7-8; cf. Eze 39:27-28).

After God keeps His promise to rescue and redeem all of His children "scattered" throughout the nations, He will live with them forever.

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<sup>6</sup> The New Exodus is discussed in "God Restores a People" (Chapter 13).