

God / Jesus Draws
A Series on the Old Testament Believer: Part 4

John 6:44 is usually emphasized against the understanding that human beings have the ability to choose a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. (John 6:44)

This view makes two presumptions: 1) Jesus is speaking of all non-Believers who will receive salvation, and 2) a literal interpretation of the word “draw;” in which human beings are so depraved that God must drag one to Jesus in order to be saved; it is God who initiates a faith that saves. But, when one takes this view, he is left with the conundrum of explaining how God does this; there aren’t any passages in the Bible that explain how God “drags” one to or gives faith.

In a later passage, when a bewildered crowd hears the voice of God from heaven, Jesus explains the purpose of God’s message and predicts His death.

And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself. (John 12:32)

Here Jesus indicates that after His death, which inaugurates the New Covenant, He will draw all men to Himself. If, from His time of death, Jesus draws both non-Believers and Old Testament Believers to Himself, then it would seem that the interpretation of John 6:44, that God draws non-Believers to Jesus today, is incorrect.

With this understanding, John 6:44 poses an interpretive problem, and the presumptions that underpin the view that God draws one to Jesus need to be re-examined – that a) Jesus is speaking of all non-Believers who will receive salvation, and b) using the word “draw” in the literal sense.

For centuries, many notable theologians have presumed that Jesus is speaking of non-Believers when He responds to the grumbling Jews in John 6:44. That Jesus says that He draws all men after His crucifixion in John 12:32 is almost universally ignored.

Another notable observation that is usually missed is that John 6:44 is part of a chiasm (John 6:35-51), which provides clarity to the passage. When examining the chiasm of John 6:35-51, it becomes apparent that Jesus is contrasting two sets of people: the non-Believing Jews and the Believing Jews (genuine Old Testament Believers).

Because the New Covenant has not been ratified with His sacrifice of atonement, Jesus’ statement of “no one can come to Him unless the Father draws” is operating under the Mosaic Covenant, which is consistent with the distinction of Jews being made in the chiasm. See the article: The Bread of Life Chiasm in John 6:35-51 at www.Helpmewithbiblestudy.org/9Salvation/CallingOTBreadOfLifeChiasm.aspx.

Examining the chiasm further, “all that the Father gives Me” (John 6:37, 39) and “everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to me” (John 6:45) are references to genuine Believers under the Mosaic Covenant, God’s holy people and His own possession (Ex 19:5; Deut 7:6; Mal 3:16-18). Of all of the Jews, only those who are genuine Believers in God, are drawn to Jesus. This offended many, because Jesus was perceived as a military Savior from Roman rule, which resulted in the desertion of many disciples (John 6:59-66)!

This view provides a better understanding of Jesus’ answer to the Canaanite woman, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24). This fascinating periscope is examined in the article “The Canaanite Woman and the Lost Sheep of Israel”.

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Within the context of the first century, Jesus used “sheep” to figuratively refer to Old Testament Believers, those who had a genuine faith in God and were faithful to the Mosaic covenant, as He ministered in the Temple, synagogues, and Jewish gathering places. This is apparent when Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees.

I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. I have other sheep, which are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd. (John 10:14-16)

The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these testify of Me. But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep. 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. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.” (John 10:24-30)

It is when speaking in the context of the eschatological future that Jesus uses “sheep” to figuratively refer to all Believers including New Testament Believers of today (Matt 25:31-33).

It is important to note that John 6:44 is a rebuke exclusively directed towards the disbelieving Jews who were the recipients of divine covenants and stewards of the word of God. The means of God’s drawing, faithful knowledge of God’s word, identified who the Messiah was, which was the stumbling block for the Jews.

The shepherds were visited by angels and informed of the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:8-14). Apparently aware of Messianic prophecies, they *listened* to the angels and wanted to see the baby Savior and praised God (Luke 2:15-20).

Simeon, knowledgeable and obedient to God’s word, was looking for the Messiah and *listened* to the Holy Spirit who showed him the baby Jesus (Luke 2:25-32). Around that same time, the prophetess Anna, presumably receiving an indication from God, knows that the baby Jesus is the Savior (Luke 2:36-38).

The early disciples, aware of the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and the testimony of John the Baptist, recognized the Messiah when they met Him. And John the Baptist knew Jesus was the Messiah, because he *listened* to God (John 1:33-51).

As a contrast, there were a few genuine Believers of God who, merely hearing of His supernatural acts fulfilled Messianic prophecies, recognized that Jesus was the Messiah and Son of God.

The Centurion who, because he loved God’s people and paid for the building of a new synagogue, demonstrated that he was an Old Testament Believer. Hearing of Jesus’ divine ability to heal, the Centurion recognized Jesus’ authority and his unworthiness of being in the presence of the Messiah. Jesus lauded this Gentile Believer for his faith (Luke 7:1-10).

The woman, who suffered from chronic bleeding, heard of Jesus’ ability to heal and believed without a doubt that merely touching the Messiah would heal. Jesus’ recognized and commended her for her faith in Him (Mark 5:24-34).

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As a side note, while Jesus “was sent for the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” His mission was not limited to OT Believers. There were non-Believing Gentiles who witnessed miracles that only God could do, which caused them to believe Jesus’ claim of Messiah.

After seeing Jesus’ omniscience, the Samaritan woman, so convinced that Jesus was the Messiah, evangelized to her home city (John 4:7-42).

After seeing his son healed, the royal official evangelized to his whole household (John 4:46-53).

With Jesus’ arrival on earth, John 6:44 indicates the transition of a Believer under the Law to a Believer under the soon to be inaugurated New Covenant. This is seen in the historical events that follow.

As early as three years within His crucifixion, the account of Jesus’ death and resurrection and His gospel was documented and being shared.

Well before the apostle Paul’s death in 67 A.D., his epistles were being circulated. Significant in that his work comprises roughly a quarter of the New Testament, the former Pharisee Paul is perhaps the most important interpreter of Jesus Christ’s teaching.

A few decades after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the Temple is destroyed (70 A.D.) and ends any possible compliance to the Mosaic Covenant. Without any reconstruction of the Temple, no sacrifices of atonement can be conducted and so ends the existence of the Old Testament Believer.

The natural meaning of John 12:32, that Jesus draws, makes sense when the term “draw” is understood figuratively (in contrast to the literal view). To “draw” is not synonymous with salvation; rather, after Jesus is “raised,” it is to bring people to see that Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection is a portrayal of both God’s and Jesus’ agape love of mankind.

Throughout the New Testament, agape love is emphasized as the basis of moral behavior. Believers, indwelt with the Spirit of Jesus (Acts 16:6-7; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11), represent the Jesus that both non-Believers and Old Testament Believers see; it is agape love that attracts (the figurative meaning of draw) non-Believers to Jesus Christ.

God’s agapē love:

For God so loved (**agapaō**) the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. (John 3:16-18)

Jesus’ agapē love:

Just as the Father has loved (**agapaō**) Me, I have also loved (**agapaō**) you; abide in My love (**agapē**). If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love (**agapē**); just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love (**agapē**). These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full. This is My commandment, that you love (**agapaō**) one another, just as I have loved (**agapaō**) you. Greater love (**agapē**) has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends. (John 15:9-13)

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A disciple's agapē love:

And He said to him, “YOU SHALL LOVE (**agapaō**) THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE (**agapaō**) YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matt 22:37-40)

A new commandment I give to you, that you love (**agapaō**) one another, even as I have loved (**agapaō**) you, that you also love (**agapaō**) one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love (**agapē**) for one another. (John 13:34-35)

The means of drawing is the historical account of Jesus' death and resurrection, which legitimizes the gospel, and there are several examples of how various instruments are used to bring people to hear this message.

Witnessing the Day of Pentecost, devout Jews of many nationalities (whether they were OT Believers or not) listened to Peter's sermon on Jesus' death and resurrection and many came to faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:5-47).

In similar manner, whether these Jews were genuine OT Believers or not, some 5,000 came to faith in Jesus Christ after Peter's sermon on Jesus' death and resurrection at an outer court of the Temple (Acts 3:11 - 4:4).

The Ethiopia eunuch was reading the Old Testament and came to faith in God when Philip “preached Jesus to him.” (Acts 8:25-37)

Although Cornelius was a Gentile, he was likely an Old Testament Believer, because he and his family was devout, feared God and prayed (Acts 10:1-48). It is in this context of a Believer that Cornelius was “divinely directed” to send for Peter (Acts 10:22) who preaches the gospel of Jesus Christ, and Cornelius and other Gentiles present come to faith and get baptized. It is this incident in which the apostle Peter realizes that the Good News is also for the Gentiles.

The Gentiles at Pisidian Antioch presents an interesting case of conversion (Acts 13:14-48). In this instance, the Bible states that “as many as had been appointed believed,” which suggests divine appointment (Acts 13:48). There are several lines of evidence that supports the idea that these particular Gentiles believed in God and were considered Believers under the Mosaic Covenant:

- a) They met in the synagogue on the Sabbath and their number prompted the Jews to become jealous of the apostles Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:44-45).
- b) One week earlier, the apostle Paul addressed the congregation as “Brethren, sons of Abraham's family and those among you who fear God,” and it was these people who begged both Paul and Barnabas to speak again at the next Sabbath (Acts 13:26, 42-43).
- c) When the covenant with Moses was made, there was never any mention of eternal life. Because of their genuine faith under the Old Covenant, these believing Gentiles were appointed to eternal life as promised by Jesus Christ whose crucifixion initiated the New Covenant.

Lydia, the Gentile seller of purple fabric, was a worshiper of God (Acts 16:14).

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According to Jewish law, a quorum of ten men was required to establish a synagogue. If a synagogue is not available, a place of prayer on the Sabbath would be outside and near a body of water, which is why Paul searched for a place of prayer along the river (Acts 16:13). Finding a group of women assembled testified to their devotion to God.

Because of Lydia's faith, God enabled her to respond to the Good News that the apostle Paul was sharing (Acts 16:13-15).

The apostle Paul would continue to preach the gospel with an emphasis on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ:

So, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance. For this reason some Jews seized me in the temple and tried to put me to death. So, having obtained help from God, I stand to this day testifying both to small and great, stating nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place; that the Christ was to suffer, and that by reason of His resurrection from the dead He would be the first to proclaim light both to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles." (Acts 26:19-23)

Recognizing that John 6:44 is directed towards the Jews while John 12:32 is directed to all allows for the natural meaning of the words found in both passages. In so doing, one can understand how a Believer under the Law transitions to a Believer under the New Covenant. This distinction between a Believer under the Mosaic Covenant and one under the New Covenant improves one's ability of understanding the gospels and Acts. Faith is not a mysterious exercise. With a clearer understanding of the salvation process, a Believer may be a better testimony and witness to the world.