

What is Jesus doing now?

Part 3 – Jesus rescues us from the seductive power of evil

The story of Israel in the Old Testament illustrates what our biggest problem as humans is, because the Israelites were typical of all of us, in how we resist God, blame him, misunderstand him and treat him like an enemy. All of us ended up alienated from God (Colossians 1:21), we would have died in our sins (1 Corinthians 15:17), and simply disappeared into the ground and gone back to the nothingness we came from.

And even if that scares us enough to want to do something about it, there's nothing we **can** do about it because the story of Israel **also** reveals the overpowering influence of "sin's deceitfulness," **Hebrews 3:13**. It was an evil that Israel could never resist. My Greek-English Lexicon describes it as a "deceitful influence seducing them to sin." And **that** was the cause of Israel's demise. It wasn't because they were bad in themselves, or evil. That wasn't their biggest problem. Their biggest problem was an evil and "deceitful influence seducing them to sin."

Israel never set out to sin. It was never their intention. When God said to Israel in **Exodus 19:5**, "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession," the Israelites' response was, "**We will do everything the Lord has said,**" **verse 8**. So in their minds they **wanted** to obey God. But when God put them through a "time of testing in the desert, where your fathers tested and tried me and for forty years saw what I did," **Hebrews 3:8-9**, the Israelites fell apart: "Their hearts are always going astray, and they have not known my ways," **verse 10**. Something had seduced their hearts away from trusting God, despite forty years of God proving to them he could be trusted.

Was that just a quirk of Israel, though, a terrible weakness that only they themselves had? No. God chose Israel as a warning to **all** of us, **verse 12**: "See to it, brothers, that **none of you** has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God." What happened to Israel can happen to anyone, including Christians. Anybody can be "hardened (against God) by sin's deceitfulness."

So be warned, says Hebrews, there is a powerful force, ever-present and ever-evil, that can take down even the stoutest of hearts, like Paul's for instance, who, like Israel, **wanted** to obey God's will (Romans 7:22) but found to his utter frustration there was "another law (or will) at work" in his mind "waging war against (his own will) making me a prisoner of sin," (verse 23). And there was nothing **he** could do about it either.

The story of Israel and the story of Paul demonstrate how easily the influence of evil can seduce a human heart away from God and turn our will against him. And it's not just the *human* heart and will it poisons against God either. It took down the mighty archangel Lucifer as well. The evil in him then took down Adam and Eve, and from then on evil got the rest of us too, **Ephesians 2:1**. It left us all "dead in (our) transgressions and sins," because of "the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient." We're up against a "spirit" influence, against which a mere human will is powerless.

Is that because we're evil? No, God made us good. He gave us a beautiful mind and nature just like his. We see that in Adam who willingly obeyed and trusted God, until evil turned up, and the driving force in humans ever since has been "gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature" (verse 3). The seductive power of evil twisted the human mind into fulfilling its desires instead of God's. There's no explanation in Scripture as to *where* this evil came from, but Lucifer fell for it, so did a third of the angels, and so did Israel.

But it's in Israel **we also find the solution**. Because here's this little nation of people, hopelessly trapped in the grip of an evil Pharaoh who wants them all dead - BUT, **Exodus 2:23-24**, when "the Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out....their cry for help went up to God" and "**GOD HEARD their groaning.**" Oh, he heard all right - and he answered too. He got the Israelites out from under that terrible evil by **an act of direct intervention**. God himself went to work and rescued them.

Was that something God only did for Israel, though? No, because many centuries later we find Paul groaning and crying when he too finds himself hopelessly trapped in the grip of evil. He knows the terrible reality of his life, **Romans 7:21**, that "evil is right there with me," and because of that evil he was as much "a prisoner of the law of sin" as the Israelites were prisoners in Egypt. But when he, like Israel, cried out for help in **verse 24**, "What a wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" God did for Paul exactly what he did for Israel: **God himself answered his cry.**

The solution to evil was the same for Paul as it was for Israel: God intervened in person. But it's HOW God intervened that brings CHRIST into the picture, because in answering his own question in verse 24, Paul cries out in **verse 25**, "Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord." So Paul knew it was God who had personally intervened and lifted him out of his pitiful state, but he also knew HOW God had rescued him: it was "through Jesus Christ."

But how did Paul know it was Christ who was doing the actual work of rescuing him? He knew it from two sources - from prophecy and from his own experience. He knew the prophecy in Isaiah 59:20-21, for instance, which he quotes in **Romans 11:26-27** - "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: 'The deliverer will come from Zion; he will turn godlessness away from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins.'"

What a prophecy: Here was a promise about Christ himself rescuing all Israel from the grip of evil. But what made that promise so real to Paul was - **he could see it being fulfilled in his OWN life**. He too had been rescued from the grip of evil, so this prophecy was clearly happening already, and he had proof of it from his own experience.

And it had to be Christ doing it, because it was exactly what Isaiah had predicted Christ would do. It's what Christ had always done, though. The entire story of Israel was about Christ rescuing them from the grip of evil, described in such exquisite detail that when Jesus arrived in person he was easily recognizable as "the Lord" of the Old Testament - and especially when he cast out demons from people, because that's what the Lord of the Old Testament **did**: He rescued people from evil.

So when Paul also found himself being rescued from the grip of evil, he knew who was doing it. And the proof of it was simple: All Paul had to do was cry out like Israel did for deliverance - and the answer came. His hostility toward God disappeared. So did his resistance. So did his feeling of helplessness and frustration.

It's understandable why Paul spoke so confidently in Romans 11, therefore, about Christ being the Deliverer who would one day "save" all Israel, "turn godlessness away" from them and "take away their sins," because Paul had already had a taste of it himself. And having that taste convinced Paul that one day every ounce of evil that had held Israel in its grip would be rendered powerless, and that sin's deceitfulness would never again seduce them or twist their will against God. But this is what the entire story of Israel is for. It's telling us how God rescues us humans from our biggest problem. It's "through Jesus Christ."

That may be why Paul slightly changed Isaiah's quote from "The redeemer will come to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins," to "the deliverer will come from Zion (and) HE will turn godlessness away from Jacob," because Paul knew from his own experience now that it wasn't "repentance" - his or Jacob's - that rescues us humans from the power of evil. It was Christ. CHRIST was the one who would turn godlessness away, not Israel's repentance. Israel's repentance was at best short-lived anyway, and it was never enough to repel the overpowering influence of evil, as their tragic story reveals. But when they cried out to God for deliverance, that's when deliverance came.

The same thing happened to Paul. He hated himself when he sinned, but no matter how much he repented, or how much he delighted in God's law, evil was always "right there" with him worming its way into his mind, just as it was with Israel. But when Paul cried out for help, the seducer was stopped in its tracks. It was like a policeman stepping between him and evil and holding up his arm to stop the traffic.

So Paul knew a great Deliverer existed and what that Deliverer could do. That's why he could quote Isaiah's prediction with such confidence.

But there was something else about Isaiah's prediction that made it so real and personal to Paul. It was the fact that **Christ himself was speaking** in **Isaiah 59:21**, because it starts off with **"As for me,"** the "me" being Christ. So in asking the question in this series, "What is Christ doing now?" here's a verse where **Christ himself** is telling us what he's up to. And it all goes back to what he did for his beloved Israel: **"As for me,"** he said, **"this is my covenant with them."**

Paul remembers that Christ made a covenant with Israel - the Hebrew for "covenant" in that verse meaning "PROMISE." So Isaiah's prophecy was actually a personal promise from Christ to Israel. And the promise was this: **"My Spirit, who is on you, and my words that I have put in your mouth will not depart from your mouth, or from the mouths of your children, or from the mouths of their descendants from this time on and forever."**

It's a guarantee from Christ that he will cure Israel's problem forever. He explains HOW he's going to cure it too. It's by **"my Spirit"** (Isaiah 59:21). It's not by anything Israel does, it's done entirely by the Spirit. And that's good for us to know too, because the reason Israel and the rest of us are all **"dead in (our) transgressions and sins,"** is because of **"the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient," Ephesians 2:1.** We're up against a "spirit" influence, against which our human will is powerless.

What Christ promised Israel, then, was **another** Spirit influence that would put HIS words into their mouths (or minds), which is great to know because at heart and core that's what we humans would love to happen. We see that in the Israelites who **wanted** to obey God (Exodus 19:8), and in Paul who **delighted** in God's law in his **"inner being"** (Romans 7:22), but there was always this **other force** **"waging war against the law of my mind"** (Romans 7:23), and that's what he couldn't deal with.

By this time in Paul's life, though, he'd discovered the solution. It was all in that prophecy Christ made in Isaiah 59:21, which Paul quotes in **Romans 11:27** - **"And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins."** Because Paul knows from experience now that what Christ said in that prophecy was true. How? **Romans 8:2,** **"because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death."**

Paul had experienced something very real and remarkable. When he cried out to God for help, frustrated and really frightened at how utterly helpless he was against the seducing power of evil poisoning his mind against God, he experienced another "law" in action in his mind, this time "the law of the Spirit," which released him from the grip of this awful evil that was twisting his will against God. He found his will being bent back toward God, to the point, **verse 15,** **"we cry 'Abba, Father.'" The Father and HIS will now filled Paul's mind, exactly as Jesus promised back in Isaiah 59:21, that HIS words would forever be in their mouths. That's why Paul could say with such confidence it was "through Jesus Christ" that this "law of the Spirit" was happening.**

And notice how Paul called it a “LAW” of the Spirit. When something is called a law it means it is fixed and constant. The Spirit, therefore, is just as fixed and constant. But it **has to be** that way because evil is just as much a fixed and constant “law at work” too (Romans 7:21), and it never lets up either.

The human mind is in a constant state of war, therefore, because it’s home to this great clash of laws, all constantly and relentlessly exerting their influence on us. There’s the law of God, for instance, constantly working away in our minds making us “**desire to do what is good,**” **Romans 7:18**. But right alongside it is “**another law at work,**” **verse 23**, “**waging war against the law of my mind,**” making us NOT want to do what is good. So now we’ve got two laws, both fixed and constant, both exerting their influence, and both never letting up in our minds for one second.

The trouble with the law of evil, however, is that any time it takes the high ground in our minds, it kicks in another law, the “**law of sin and death,**” **Romans 8:2**. And that law renders us powerless, to the point that even when we want to do good we “**cannot carry it out,**” (Romans 7:18). But along comes a fourth law, thanks to Christ, that cancels out the law of sin and death, “**in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us,**” **Romans 8:4**. It frees up the human will and heart “**to do what is good,**” which is great, because at heart and core that’s what we want to do.

But the only way that can be done is by the Spirit being a fixed and constant influence in our minds, because “evil is right there with us” too, forever “**crouching at your door, desiring to have you,**” **Genesis 4:7**. It never goes away. It never lets up. It’s always there, ready to pounce, tempt and seduce us into “**not doing what is right**” (same verse). And it must’ve existed all the way back into eternity as well, because how did Lucifer fall for evil if evil wasn’t already there to tempt him as well?

Because of Jesus Christ, though, our eternal worst problem now has an eternal solution. It’s “**the law of the Spirit of life.**” But what made that so real to Paul was not only experiencing the law of the Spirit in his **own** life, but also realizing this was what God had called **Israel** into existence for, to reveal through them and their experience that the Spirit is the only solution to our biggest problem.

That’s why Paul came up with a verse like **Galatians 3:14** when talking of “**the blessing given to Abraham,**” which would later “**come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus.**” Because Paul could now see clearly, from both the story of Israel and his own experience, what that blessing was. It’s in the last five words in that verse: it’s “**the promise of the Spirit.**”

So Paul goes right back to Abraham because he knows now why Abraham and Israel existed. Israel not only exposed humanity’s biggest problem, it also revealed the one and only great and perfect solution, “the promise of the Spirit.”

And the first people ever to experience that promise of the Spirit are “we ourselves,” **Romans 8:23**, “who have the firstfruits of the Spirit.” Christians, therefore, are the first to experience the solution to humanity’s biggest problem. So, what exactly does the Spirit do for us? A simple answer, **verse 26**: “the Spirit helps us in our weakness.”

Notice that it’s “weakness” we need help with. We’re not bad, we’re just “weak in our natural selves” (Romans 6:19). Our problem has always been not having it in us naturally to resist the seducing power of sin’s deceitfulness. We’d like to resist it but we can’t, and we groan like Paul in our weakness. “BUT,” **verse 26**, “the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.” We’ve actually got the Spirit groaning along **with** us. He hears our groans and INTERCEDES for us - exactly as Christ promised in Isaiah 59.

And how does the Spirit intercede? **Verse 27** - “the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God’s will.” The Spirit gives strength to our human will to obey God’s will, which is how we (and Israel) survive and resist evil forever. It’s the Spirit forever turning our minds and will toward God, so that forever we are “controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit,” **verse 9**, and “by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body,” **verse 13**. And it’s **only** by the Spirit this happens too, because our human will WITHOUT the Spirit “does not submit to God’s law (or will), nor can it do so,” **verse 7**. The story of Israel proves that.

But way back in the same story of Israel in **Ezekiel 36:27**, Christ promised the solution: “And I (Christ) will put my Spirit in you.” The purpose of which is? To “move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.” The Spirit would directly intervene inside our minds, tuning us to God’s will all the time, so evil can’t touch us.

We see that played out in the story of Israel too, when God answers their cry for help, rescues them from Egypt, takes them to a place where they’re no longer under the power of the Pharaoh’s will and **the Pharaoh can’t touch them**. But that was all deliberately done by Christ as a picture of what the Spirit would do for all humanity one day, beginning with Christians, because “anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the one who was born of God (Christ) keeps him safe, and the evil one does not touch him,” **1 John 5:18**.

When Christ rescues he rescues totally. It takes some powerful confrontation with some of the sins and evils that hold us in their grip, but cry out to God and he will rescue us. But first, like Israel, we have to experience the seductive power of evil, so that we come to realize it’s only by the Spirit’s power that evil cannot touch us. No wonder David pleaded with God when evil held him in its grip, “Do not take your Spirit from me,” **Psalms 51:11**, because he knew it took SPIRIT power to release him from the seductive power of evil and tune his will to God’s will again.