

Divine Protection Today?

by Staff

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Have you ever read the book, *Robinson Crusoe*? Like many, I read it years ago as a schoolboy, but I re-read it more recently, and to my amazement, I found it to be very inspiring. Yes, it is a work of pure fiction, but if its author, Daniel Defoe, were alive today, I would write to tell him that his famous book helped me through the greatest period of trial in my life.

How could a fictional book be so inspiring? For those unfamiliar with the story, poor Robinson Crusoe is in the most dreadful predicament imaginable. Shipwrecked on a desert island, he literally does not know where on earth he is. He faces years of the most terrible dangers and trials: loneliness, tropical heat, storms, diseases and fevers. To add to these problems, wild animals and cannibals want to have him for lunch!

During the course of his story, Robinson, writing in diary format, goes through a very deep and meaningful repentance. He begins to study his Bible, which he has salvaged from the wrecked ship. He studies every day and talks to God almost constantly. Robinson learns to depend on God for physical, as well as spiritual, deliverance. He quotes the Bible often, not in a sugary or over-emotional way, but accurately and meaningfully. Two of the scriptures he quotes—ones that affected and inspired me most—are:

- » "Call on me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you." (Psalm 50:15)
- » "I will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)

Are we like the fictional Robinson Crusoe? Have we learned to trust in God for deliverance from danger and trials, both spiritual and physical? Or do we think that God's miraculous protection ceased with the death of the last New Testament personality?

We will see that God is just as capable of miraculously protecting His children today as He ever was!

Israel Protected

Thousands of years ago, God made some great promises to His obedient servant, Abraham: promises of wealth, blessings, greatness and protection (Genesis 12:2-3, 14:18-20, 22:17-18). These blessings were passed down through Abraham's descendants, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, to the children of Israel (see Genesis 24, 26-28, 35, 48; Numbers 24; Deuteronomy 1, 7-8, 11, 15-16, 28, 30, 33).

During the Days of Unleavened Bread every year, we read about the great miracles that God performed at the Red Sea to rescue His people from the Egyptians. Let's take another look at this story in the context of God's physical protection and rescue.

So the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, his horsemen and his army, and overtook them camping by the sea beside Pi Hahiroth,

before Baal Zephon. And when Pharaoh drew near, the children of Israel lifted their eyes, and behold, the Egyptians marched after them. So they were very afraid, and the children of Israel cried out to the Lord. . . .

And Moses said to the people, "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."

And the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain honor over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gained honor over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen."

And the angel of God, who went before the camp of Israel, moved and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before them and stood behind them. So it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel. Thus it was a cloud and darkness to the one, and it gave light by night to the other, so that the one did not come near the other all that night.

Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea into dry land, and the waters were divided. So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. (Exodus 14:9-10, 13-22)

Fantastic miracles, to be sure! But can God—does God—still perform such miracles of physical protection in modern times? Or, to use biblical language, has His hand grown short?

Miracle at Dunkirk

After a long deferral, due to the great sins of Israel, God began to fulfill His promises to the patriarchs and to shower blessings on their descendants, beginning around the start of the 19th century. It appears that in the late spring of 1940, God had not yet finished with His blessings or miraculous protection upon the modern descendants of Israel.

The evacuation of Allied forces from Dunkirk is looked upon, even by secular historians, as a miracle. Its account contains some striking parallels to God's evacuation of the Israelites through the Red Sea. Here is a quotation from the sub-chapter entitled "Miracle at Dunkirk" from *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* by William Shirer:

Ever since May 20, when [German General]Guderian's tanks broke through to Abbeville on the sea, the British Admiralty, on the personal orders of Churchill, had been rounding up shipping for a possible evacuation of the B.E.F. [British Expeditionary Force]and other Allied forces from the Channel ports. Noncombatant personnel . . . began to be ferried across the narrow sea to England at once. By May 24 . . . the German armor,

striking up the coast from Abbeville, [stood] only twenty miles from Dunkirk. In between were caught the Belgian army, the nine divisions of the B.E.F. and ten divisions of the French First Army. Though the terrain on the southern end of the pocket was bad tank country, being crisscrossed with canals, ditches and flooded areas, Guderian's and Reinhardt's panzer corps already had five bridgeheads across the main barrier, the Aa Canal, . . . and were poised for the knockout blow which would hammer the Allied armies against the anvil of the advancing German Sixth and Eighteenth armies pushing down from the northeast and utterly destroy them.

Suddenly on the evening of May 24 came the peremptory order from the High Command, issued at the insistence of Hitler, . . . that the tank forces should halt on the canal line and attempt no further advance. This furnished Lord Gort [Commander of the Allied forces] an unexpected and vital reprieve which he and the British Navy and Air Force made the most of and which, as Rundstedt later perceived and said, led "to one of the great turning points in the war."

How did this inexplicable stop order on the threshold of what seemed certain to be the greatest German victory of the campaign come about? What were the reasons for it? And who was responsible? The questions have provoked one of the greatest arguments of the war, among the German generals involved and among the historians. . . .

Finally, on the evening of May 26, Hitler rescinded the stop order and . . . the armored forces could resume their advance on Dunkirk. By then it was late; the cornered enemy had had time to strengthen his defenses and behind them was beginning to slip away to sea. . . .

At three minutes before seven on the evening of May 26, shortly after Hitler's stop order had been canceled, the British Admiralty signaled the beginning of "Operation Dynamo," as the Dunkirk evacuation was called. That night the German armor resumed its attack on the port from the west and south, but now the panzers found it hard going. The tanks made little progress. [See Exodus 14:24-25!]

Lord Gort had had time to deploy against them three infantry divisions with heavy artillery support. In the meantime the evacuation began. An armada of 850 vessels of all sizes, shapes and methods of propulsion, from cruisers and destroyers to small sailboats and Dutch skoots, many of them manned by civilian volunteers from the English coastal towns, converged on Dunkirk. The first day, May 27, they took off 7,669 troops; the next day, 17,804; the following day, 47,310; and on May 30, 53,823, for a total of 126,606 during the first four days. This was far more than the Admiralty had hoped to get out. When the operation began, it counted on evacuating only about 45,000 men in the two days' time it then thought it would have. . . .

The next day, May 31, was the biggest day of all. Some 68,000 men were embarked for England, a third of them from the beaches, the rest from the Dunkirk harbor. A total of 194,620 men had now been taken out, more than four times the number originally hoped for.

Where was the famed Luftwaffe? Part of the time . . . it was grounded by bad weather. The rest of the time it encountered unexpected opposition from the Royal Air Force,

which from bases just across the Channel successfully challenged it for the first time. Though outnumbered, the new British Spitfires proved more than a match for the Messerschmitts. . . .

[The Luftwaffe] failed to achieve what Goering had promised Hitler: the annihilation of the B.E.F. On June 1 . . . the second-highest day's total was evacuated—64,429 men. By dawn of the next day, only 4,000 British troops remained in the perimeter, protected by 100,000 French who now manned the defenses. . . .

The Luftwaffe at that time did not operate after dark, and during the nights of June 2 and 3, the remainder of the B.E.F. and 60,000 French troops were successfully brought out. Dunkirk, still defended stubbornly by 40,000 French soldiers, held out until the morning of June 4. By that day 338,226 British and French soldiers had escaped the German clutches. . . .

A deliverance Dunkirk was to the British.

Who stopped those tanks? Shirer, after weighing the evidence, feels that the stop order originated with Hitler himself, influenced by Herman Goering, who, in his vanity, wanted the Luftwaffe (the German air force, which he headed) to have the glory of the victory rather than the German army. Like Israel's exodus from Egypt, the course of history was mightily changed through vanity! Did God harden Hitler's heart as He did Pharaoh's?

Falklands Miracles

Some might say, "Okay, but that Dunkirk episode was fifty years ago. I wasn't even born then!" Has God protected or delivered the descendants of Israel in more recent years? Or has He now cut our nations off from His protection because of our national sins?

In 1983 the British found it necessary to go to war when Argentina invaded the Falkland Islands in the South Atlantic. This brief war captured the attention of the whole world, and much has been written about it. In fact, a whole book, *The Falklands Miracle*, deals with the "incredibly good luck" that Britain experienced at so many different times during the short conflict.

For example, at the very time the Argentine army surrendered at the island's capital, Port Stanley, the British were almost completely out of ammunition. If the Argentineans had not surrendered at precisely that time, the British would have had to retreat, thus prolonging the conflict and the loss of life, and possibly even reversing the result of the war.

A second Falklands story comes, not from the aforementioned book, but from a cousin of mine in Liverpool, England. At the time he was serving in the British army, and after some special training, was put aboard the luxury P&O liner, *Canberra*, which had been hurriedly converted into a troopship.

As they steamed into the South Atlantic, their floating home came under severe attack by Argentine jet fighters. The planes attacked one side of the ship with their rockets, peeled off and came back again, concentrating their fire on the same side of the ship. Although the rockets exploded, for some reason the blasts did not penetrate the hull of the ship. The soldiers watching (somewhat fearfully, no doubt) said that the explosions seemed merely to bounce off the hull, inflicting very little damage.

An investigation discovered that, when the *Canberra* was first built at Harland and Wolff's shipyard in Belfast back in the 1960s, engineers found an unacceptable twist in the hull that threw off the whole design of the ship. To correct this twist, more weight was required in one side of the hull. The shipwrights provided this weight by lining that side of the hull—the side the Argentinean fighters attacked—with a couple of inches of concrete!

Spiritual Israelites Protected

God has miraculously protected and delivered the physical descendants of Israel many times to fulfil His promises to Abraham. One day soon, however, due to the disobedience and idolatry of our nations, He will take away these often unrecognized blessings of protection and deliverance. How soon that may be, one can only speculate.

But what about spiritual Israel, God's true church? What about us? Does God protect us? Do His promises of physical deliverance apply to us?

We can have supreme confidence that they do.

On a winter's night some years ago, a Canadian minister fell asleep at the wheel of his car while driving home after a particularly exhausting day. His wife was also dozing in the car. All of a sudden, they both heard a loud, clear voice shout, "John!" waking them instantly and averting a possibly dreadful crash. The minister stopped the car and got out to clear his head with the aid of some fresh air. He retraced the car's tire tracks in the snow for a short distance and found that the tracks disappeared as they approached the side of the road, then reappeared again a few yards further on. The car should have crashed into a deep, roadside ditch!

Many of God's people can recount similar inspiring stories, many of which they experienced personally. Why should we be surprised at these things? God has given us a solid, although conditional, promise of protection.

Conditional? Yes, conditional. The words God spoke to Joshua, before he led the Israelites into the Promised Land, also apply to us:

No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. (Joshua 1:5-6)

Now, here are the conditions:

Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever

you go. . . . Whoever rebels against your command and does not heed your words, in all that you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage. (verses 7-9, 18)

The writer of Hebrews takes a similar approach:

Let your conduct be without covetousness, and be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say, "The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. (Hebrews 13:5-8)

We can have the fullest confidence that God will give us His divine protection when we need it. Like Joshua and the members of the early church, we should be strong and of good courage. If we follow the good examples of our church leaders, past and present—if we remain content with the blessings God has given us—if we worship Him, obey Him and serve Him as He commands us, He will never fail us. Like Robinson Crusoe, we can come to trust in God, who never lets us walk alone.