

I will never leave you nor forsake you

Have you ever read the book, "Robinson Crusoe"?

Like many, I read it years ago when I was a schoolboy. But I re-read it more recently and, to my amazement, 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 him and tell him that his famous book helped me through the greatest trial period of my life

How could a fictional book be so inspiring? For those of you who are not familiar with the story, poor Robinson Crusoe is in one of the most dreadful predicaments imaginable. He has been shipwrecked on a desert island. He is the sole survivor of the wreck and 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 over for lunch!

During the course of his story, Robinson, writing in the first person singular 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 spiritual, deliverance as well as for physical deliverance from all the tremendous dangers and problems that now beset him. He quotes the Bible often, not in a sugary or over-emotional way, but accurately and meaningfully. Two of the scriptures he quotes which affected and inspired me most were these:

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 *you* like the fictional Robinson Crusoe? Have *you* learnt to trust in God for deliverance from danger and trials, both spiritual and physical? Or do you think that God's miraculous protection somehow ceased after the death of the last New Testament personality? It is the purpose of this article to show you that God today is just as capable of miraculously protecting His children as He ever was

Physical Israel protected

Thousands of years ago, God made some great promises to His obedient servant, Abraham: promises of wealth, blessings, greatness and protection:

I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2-3)

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: and blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all. (Genesis 14:18-20)

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice. (Genesis 22:17-18)

These blessings were passed down through Abraham's descendants: Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, and down to the children of Israel (See Genesis chapters 24, 26, 27, 28, 35, and 48, Numbers chapter 24, Deuteronomy chapters 1, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16, 28, 30, and 33)

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

But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon. And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD... And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine 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, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And 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 dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto 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?

Miracle at Dunkirk

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

The evacuation of allied forces from Dunkirk is looked upon, even by secular historians, as a miracle and its account contains some striking parallels to God's evacuation of the Israelites through the Red Sea. Here is a quote 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, after taking Boulogne and enveloping Calais, had reached the Aa Canal 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, between Gravelines on the sea and St.-Omer, 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 with the prompting of Rundstedt and Goering but over the violent objections of Brauchitsch and Halder, 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...

Goering had intervened with Hitler... He offered to liquidate the entrapped enemy troops with his Air Force alone! The reasons for his ambitious and vain proposal were given the writer [*William Shirer*] in the letter from Halder...

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...

No more now than in all the years before did he [*Hitler*] comprehend the character of the British nation... Nor did he and his generals, ignorant of the sea as they were - and remained - dream that the sea-minded British could evacuate a third of a million men from a small battered port and from the exposed beaches right under their noses.

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. *[How reminiscent of 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.

It was not until this fourth day of Operation Dynamo, on May 30, that the German High Command woke up to what was happening. For four days the communiqués of the OKW had been reiterating that the encircled enemy armies were doomed. A communiqué of May 29... stated flatly: "The British army, which has been compressed into the territory... around Dunkirk, is also going to its destruction before our concentric attack." *[See Exodus 14:1-3]*

But it wasn't; it was going to sea... with the certainty that the men would live to fight another day...

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...

It [*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 Guderian's tanks? Author William Shirer, after weighing the evidence, felt that the stop order originated with Hitler himself, influenced by Herman Goering who, in his vanity, wanted the Luftwaffe (the German air force, of which he was the head) to have the glory of the victory rather than giving it to 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, "O.K., 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?

**If thou shalt say in thine heart, These nations are more than I; how can I dispossess them? Thou shalt not be afraid of them: but shalt well remember what the LORD thy God did unto Pharaoh, and unto all Egypt; the great temptations which thine eyes saw, and the signs, and the wonders, and the mighty hand, and the stretched out arm, whereby the LORD thy God brought thee out: so shall the LORD thy God do unto all the people of whom thou art afraid. Moreover the LORD thy God will send the hornet among them, until they that are left, and hide themselves from thee, be destroyed. Thou shalt not be affrighted at them: for the LORD thy God is among you, a mighty God and terrible. And the LORD thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee. But the LORD thy God shall deliver them unto thee, and shall destroy them with a mighty destruction, until they be destroyed. And he shall deliver their kings into thine hand, and thou shalt destroy their name from under heaven: there shall no man be able to stand before thee, until thou have destroyed them."
(Deuteronomy 7:17-24)**

The British found it necessary back in 1983 to do some military "dispossessing" 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. There is, in fact, a whole book, "The Falklands Miracle," that deals with the "incredibly good luck" that Britain experienced at so many different times during the short conflict

One example is that 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 hadn't 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 final result of the war

A second Falklands story comes, not from the aforementioned book, but rather from a cousin of mine who lives near my parents in Liverpool, England. He was serving in the British army at the time and, after some special training, was, along with thousands of his comrades, put aboard the luxury P&O liner "Canberra" (which had been hurriedly converted into a troopship)



SS Canberra

As they steamed into the South Atlantic, their floating home came under severe attack by Argentinean jet fighters. These planes attacked one side of the ship with their rockets, peeled off and came back again, concentrating their aim on the same side of the ship. Although the rockets did explode, their explosions for some reason did not penetrate the hull of the ship. The soldiers watching (somewhat fearfully, no doubt) said that the explosions seemed to merely bounce off the hull and that they inflicted very little damage. On investigation, it was discovered that, when the Canberra was first built (at Harland and Wolff's shipyard in Belfast) back in the 60's, there was an unacceptable twist in the hull, which threw off the whole design of the ship. To correct this twist, more weight was required in one side of the hull. The weight was provided by lining that side of the hull with a couple of inches of concrete!

Spiritual Israelites protected too

Many such stories could be told of God's miraculous deliverance, but space does not allow. It appears that the physical descendants of Israel have been miraculously protected and delivered in order to fulfil God's promises to Abraham. We do know, however, that one day soon, due to the disobedience and idolatry of our nations, these blessings of protection and deliverance will be taken away.

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

We can have confidence that they do

One instance that comes immediately to mind takes me back to the winter's night some years ago when one of our Canadian ministers 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!" which woke them both instantly, thus 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 you can recount similar stories. They are always inspiring to read about or listen to. But 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 you and me. Some of the words are repeated in the epistle to the Hebrews:

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 fail you or forsake you. Be strong and of good courage; for you shall cause this people to inherit 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, being careful to do according to all the law which Moses my servant commanded you; turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall have good success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; be not frightened, neither be dismayed; for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go... Whoever rebels against your commandment and disobeys your words, whatever you command him, shall be put to death. Only be strong and of good courage." (Joshua 1:7-9, 18)

And again in the New Testament:

Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never fail you nor forsake you." Hence we can confidently say, "The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?" Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever." (Hebrews 13:5-8)

If we emulate the obedient and persevering attitude of the Philadelphia church, God promises His protection from the future, worldwide hour of severe trial:

Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth. (Revelation 3:10)

I will never leave you nor forsake you

The Church of God - Canada

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 too 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 leave us, nor forsake us

John Plunkett

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