

# GOD SAVES A PEOPLE

## 3

---

### ISRAEL SAVED AGAIN AND AGAIN

#### Background from the Author

**Joshua.** The *Resource Book* passes over Joshua quickly. You may mention that some scholars use the term “Hexateuch” as a way of indicating the continuity of the stories in the first six books of our Old Testament. Jews, however, take Joshua as the beginning of a different part of their canon. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings<sup>1</sup> were treated as scrolls of the “Former Prophets” partly because of the prominent roles played by Samuel, Elijah, and other early prophetic figures, and partly because the narratives were not simply records of events but told how God dealt with the people in those early years.

**Judges.** The period of the judges presents a situation different from the periods under the leadership of Moses and Joshua. One important value to be noted is the pattern of experience that is presented. The people fall away from their right relation with God—they sin. They undergo oppression. They call to Yahweh for help. Yahweh saves them through a human deliverer. Gideon is the best illustration for this theme. The group will also know something of Samson.

**Kings.** These stories present a special temptation to digress. The point for us here is that God delivered the people through the agency of kings or by direct divine action in the times

---

<sup>1</sup> “First” and “Second” refer to the fact that originally Samuel and Kings were each too long to be copied on one scroll.

of kings. Detailed study of the monarchy calls for a separate course—especially in the period of the divided kingdom.

**Elijah and Elisha.** The roles of these prophets are very important. Elijah became the prototype of the Old Testament prophet; see, for example, Malachi 4:5 and Mark 9:4. The contest with Jezebel and the priests of Baal demonstrates that God's deliverance was not always from foreign political enemies. The story is a great one. (Note that Jezebel's name became a synonym for wicked woman; see, for example, Revelation 2:20.) The personal deliverance of Elijah is bound up with the national destiny.

Another aspect of God's saving power relates to those outside the Israelite nation. Jesus mentions Elijah's stay in Zarephath and the healing of Naaman under Elisha's direction (Luke 4:25-27; note Research 3). The implication of God's concern for outsiders was not a welcome message among Jesus' hearers in Nazareth. This incident will show up several times in later sessions.

About Miracles. Several of the stories in this part may raise a problem about miracles. It is important to understand that a study of miracles could quickly land us in dogmatic theology or philosophy of religion. The Bible accepts but does not discuss miracles.

It is important to keep three things separate: (1) What the text says; (2) what the text intends its readers to learn; and (3) where the authority of the text lies. Now (3) is primarily a matter for theological study. Does the authority of the text depend upon its conformity to twentieth-century understanding of natural laws and processes? I do not think so. When Moses left Egypt, the world contained all the raw material necessary to make a diesel truck, and I suppose we may say that God knew how to make one. How handy it would have been to haul the tabernacle and other baggage! But God does not deal in anachronisms. That is a foible of God's people in modern times. Likewise it will be relatively profitless to debate about whether the donkey actually talked with Balaam. The meaning of the story is clear in its own setting. (It is somewhat like the story of a messenger of God who was running his own way when a large fish stopped him!) Balaam must deliver precisely the message God directs and do it on God's terms.

Similar analysis applies to the miraculous details in the Gideon story. It is clear throughout that the wonders take place to establish beyond question that it is Yahweh who is delivering the people. Gideon does not save the people: God does! So it is beside the point to explain away the military action. Then one must explain away the fleece and dew.

And so on. Again, the intent of the story is plain. To insist that the value of the story depends upon whether the events seem possible to us is to miss the point.

This is not a rejection of the possibility of miraculous events. God remains Lord of creation, and we must never be closed to the limitless possibilities of divine power. The authority and inspiration of scripture, however, do not depend upon making it conform to our ideas of what is possible nor upon accepting perceptions of ages whose understanding of nature was radically different from ours. Do not use your time in debates that are likely to be fruitless.

This goes, too, for the Elijah-Elisha cycles of stories. Do not spoil the grandeur of Yahweh's displays of power by trying to explain how ravens fed Elijah or how bathing in the Jordan healed Naaman—nor by thinking that questions about either story imply disbelieving the Bible.

## **SESSION PLANS**

---

### ***Learning Objectives***

This session is intended to enable participants to:

1. Place the period of Judges and Kings on a timeline.
2. Name at least five occasions when Israel experienced God's deliverance during the time of Judges and Kings.
3. Retell in their own words at least one of these stories of God's deliverance.
4. Relate elements of these stories to contemporary experience.

### ***Resources You May Need***

3 x 5 cards

Bibles

Timeline or extra copies of individual timelines (both from session 2)

Copies of Worksheet A, "TV Presentations"

Copies of Worksheet B, "Contemporary Experiences of God"

Noisemakers and a timer for the Review Game

## ***Leadership Strategy***

### SETTING THE STAGE

- 1. Review Game.** Because the events covered in this and the preceding sessions cover a large sweep of history, it will be helpful to review. Play "Who Am I?" the review game located in Appendix 2 at the back of this *Leader's Guide*, using only the questions covered in the first three sessions. As indicated in the Appendix, you may choose a simple or more elaborate method of play. (10-15 minutes)

**or**

- Psalm of Sacred History.** Invite the participants to name as many of the events surrounding the exodus and the wilderness journey as they can remember. List the events as they are named. Then read responsively **Psalm 105:23-45**. Add to your list any events mentioned in the Psalm that were missing from your list. Then read or state in your own words the first paragraph of Dr. Walther's Summary on page 14 in the *Resource Book*. (10 minutes)
- 2. Timeline Update.** Direct the group members' attention to the group timeline you began last session or to their own personal timelines if you distributed them at the last session. (Have additional copies available for those who were absent.) Observe that this session covers some 700 years. It will be helpful to put the major divisions of that 700-year period on the timeline. Referring to the "Bible timeline" in Appendix 1, put the Entrance into Canaan, Beginning of the Monarchy (Saul), and the Reign of David on the timeline. Note that from the time of the Israelites' entry into Canaan until Saul became king, Yahweh "raised up judges" to deliver the people. (Judges 2:16). Therefore the period from 1250 – 1030 BCE is known as the period of *Judges*. (Write "Judges" on the timeline.) Samuel was the last judge. During Samuel's time, the people demanded a king, and with Yahweh's blessing, Samuel anointed Saul as Israel's first king. The period of

Kings (the monarchy) extends from 1030 until 587 BCE when the Babylonians defeated the southern nation, destroyed the temple, and took Israel's leaders into captivity in Babylon. (Write "Kings" on the timeline.) Tell the group members that as they consider particular stories and events, they are to place these events on the timeline. (8-10 minutes)

### EXPLORING THE SCRIPTURE

- 1. TV Presentations.** Divide into five small groups and assign each group one of the scripture passages and tasks on Worksheet A, "TV Presentations." After 20 minutes, bring the whole group members together to give their presentations. After each presentation, ask the group to decide approximately when each event happened (at least whether it would fall into the period of Judges or Kings.) The crossing of the Jordan occurred approximately 1250 BCE. Gideon was a judge early in the period of the Judges. Samuel was the last judge. Elijah's contest occurred during the reign of King Ahab, c. 874-853. Naaman's healing occurred during the time of Elisha the prophet, 850-800 BCE. List each event on the group timeline, or suggest that the participants add the events to their individual timelines. (35 minutes)

or

**Writing Couplets.** On chalkboard or on individual 3 x 5 cards, write the following scripture texts and assign one text to each group.

Joshua 4:1-24

1 Kings 18:17-39

Judges, chapter 6-7

2 Kings 5:1-14

1 Samuel 7:1-13

Based on its assigned text, each group is to write a new two-line verse to the "The Song of Miriam." If the group members did not learn the "The Song of Miriam" in Session 1, suggest that they write a couplet (2-line poem) that has a flavor or style similar to Miriam's victory song, which is found in **Exodus 15:21**. The couplets need not rhyme. (Hebrew poetry did not rhyme.) After about 15 minutes, bring the groups together and have each group sing or read its verse or couplet. If the groups have written new verses to "The Song of Miriam," you may want

to have a volunteer type all the verses and photocopy the whole song to sing at future sessions. (20 minutes)

- 2. Contemporary Statements.** Introduce this activity by noting that when we read Bible stories, we may feel distanced from them by their ancient language and setting. Divide into 3 or more groups of 4-7, giving each group a section of Worksheet B, "Contemporary Experiences of God." Ask them to read the quotation, discuss the questions and prepare a statement for the class in response to the religious skeptics' complaints. After 15-20 minutes, bring the group back together to hear the statements. Invite comments from the group after each statement. (20-25 minutes)

**or**

**Group Discussion.** Lead a discussion with the whole group based on one or more of the issues in Worksheet A. After discussing the particular issue(s) ask:

- What factors seem to influence our perceptiveness to God's presence and activity?
- What elements of faith are constant from ancient to modern times?
- How can we be more receptive to God's guidance and will? (15 minutes)

### CLOSING

- 1. "The Song of Miriam."** If the group has written new verses for "The Song of Miriam," sing the whole song, beginning with the original verse and having each group, in order, sing its verse with everyone joining in the refrain. If the group wrote couplets, recite them in the same manner, beginning by reading Miriam's song in **Exodus 15:21**. (5 minutes)

**and/or**

- 2. Thanksgiving for Leaders.** Observe that this session has focused on several significant leaders in the history of our faith family; then invite the participants to suggest leaders of more recent times or in the world today who might be a "Gideon, a Miriam, a Saul or an Elijah." Allow a few minutes for them to name some names. Then offer the following prayer:

God of the past, the present, and the future, thank you for the leaders of the past, faithful men and women who heard your voice, responded to your call, and led us in your way. Thank you for Jocebed, the brave mother of Moses who hid her baby in a basket in the bulrushes. Thank you for Moses, who led the people out of slavery in Egypt, and for his sister Miriam and her triumphant song. Thank you for Joshua, for Gideon, for Samuel, for Saul and David, for the Prophets Elijah and Elisha, and for countless other leaders who helped to transmit our faith story from generation to generation. As we remember these names, we think of other leaders who in more recent times have heard your voice, responded to your call, and led us in your way. Hear us, we pray, as we name some of them now. (pause for participants to name more recent leaders.) Thank you for each of these we have named, and thank you especially for sending to us Jesus the Christ, our crucified and risen Lord. Lead us in your way, we pray, this day and every day. Amen. (4-5 minutes)

**or**

**Your Own Prayer.** Offer your own prayer thanking God for the leaders of the past and the present and asking for God's continued guidance in the future. (2 minutes)

### ***Looking Ahead***

In the next session, "Setting the Stage #2" and "Exploring the Scripture #2" suggests simulating the exile, the return to Jerusalem, and the Maccabean Revolt. If you choose this option, you will need to recruit 2-3 volunteer "soldiers" ahead of time and instruct them in their role. You will also need to locate an area away from your regular learning area that can represent "exile." This area might be outdoors, in the sanctuary, or even in a hallway. You will also need to arrange for a simple altar area to represent worship in the temple and to find something to represent an "idol," such as a child's large inflated toy, a statue, or a grocery bag with "\$\$\$\$" written on it.

Follow up your efforts to locate an audiocassette or CD of the spiritual, "Dry Bones," and equipment on which to play it for the "Closing" in the next session.

## Worksheet A

### TV Presentations

*Working as a group, prepare a presentation based on one of the following scripture passages. You have 20 minutes to prepare.*

**(1) Joshua 4:1-24.**

You are a reporter from ITV, Israel TV. You are on the scene as the people of Israel are crossing the River Jordan under the leadership of Joshua. You are to present a **live newscast**. Present the story to your TV audience as it is happening! You may zero in the camera on some of the action. You may also want to interview some people on the scene.

**(2) Judges, chapters 6 and 7.**

You are to prepare a presentation of the TV program, **“This Is Your Life,”** featuring Gideon. You have invited important people or observers of key events in Gideon’s life to retell for Gideon and for your TV audience segments of the story of Gideon’s life.

**(3) 1 Samuel 7:1-13.**

You are a reporter from ITV, Israel TV. You are on the scene as the armies of Israel, under the leadership of Samuel, are battling the Philistines at Mizpah, as described in **1 Samuel 7:1-13**. You are to present a **live newscast**. Present the story to your TV audience as it is happening! You may zero in the camera on some of the action. You may also want to interview some people on the scene.

**(4) 1 Kings 18:17-39.**

You are a reporter from ITV, Israel TV. You are on the scene at the contest between Elijah the prophet and the prophets of the god Baal at Mt. Carmel. You are to present a **live newscast**. Present the story to your TV audience as it is happening! You may zero in the camera on some of the action. You may also want to interview some people on the scene.



**(5) 2 Kings 5:1-14.**

You are to prepare a presentation of the TV program, **“This Is Your Life,”** featuring Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aram. You have invited important people or observers of key events in Naaman’s life to retell for Naaman and for your TV audience segments of the story of Naaman’s life.

## Worksheet B

### Contemporary Experiences of God

**Group 1 – Kelly:** “It confuses me and even makes me angry sometimes: God tells Gideon, Joshua, Moses and other people in the Bible exactly what to do while we’re left to just muddle around. How are we supposed to know what God wants us to do?”

*Discuss:*

- What do you imagine when you read passages containing God’s explicit instructions to people in the Bible?
- How do you hear people today talk about knowing what God wants them to do?
- In what ways do you communicate with God?

*As a group, compose a response to Kelly.*

**Group 2 – Walter:** “Lugging that Ark around seems so archaic. How could people really believe that the God of the universe was enthroned on a portable throne they made themselves?”

*Discuss:*

- What purpose did the Ark serve in Israel’s life during the wilderness year?
- What role do religious shrines and holy places play in the world today? How is that similar and dissimilar to the Ark?
- How are holy places helpful? How can they be misused?

*As a group, compose a response to Walter.*

**Group 3 – Beth:** “Jesus said, ‘You shall not put God to the test’ when he was tempted in the wilderness. How come it’s OK for people in the Old Testament to ask for and receive proof from God like Gideon did with the fleece and Elijah did on Mt. Carmel?”

*Discuss:*

- What do you imagine when you read about such demonstrations and tests in the Bible?
- In what ways have you heard modern people talk about signs and omens?
- How is it possible for people to have different perceptions and interpretations of the same set of circumstances?

*As a group, compose a response to Beth.*