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Summary

The experiences of the Exodus provided a pattern for interpreting the saving relationship between Yahweh and people. In the years following the Exodus Israel was delivered repeatedly from desperate situations in ways that the people understood to be God's acts.

Although Israel was under the rule of kings, Yahweh was still the power who produced the notable events in which Israel was saved. The early prophets became the chief interpreters of this point of view. We note stories in which Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha were the principal actors.

Basic Bible References

Joshua 4

Judges 6, 7

1 Samuel 7

1 Kings 18:17-39

2 Kings 5:1-14

Word List

Ark of the Covenant

Baal

Ebenezer

Judge

ISRAEL SAVED
AGAIN AND AGAIN

Invasion and Settlement in Canaan

After Moses' death Joshua assumed leadership, and the people of Israel crossed the Jordan (Joshua 3:7-17). At a location called Gilgal they erected a memorial monument of twelve stones brought from the east side of the Jordan. **Joshua 4**. Notice especially verses 21-24 and recall the role played by the Passover in Israel's remembrance of God's deliverance. Joshua 5:10-12 tells how the first Passover in the Promised Land was observed. From that time on, the *manna*, which had fed them in the wilderness, was no longer provided. Most of the rest of the narrative about the settlement of the new land tells about military offensives. For now we may pass by these stories.

After Joshua's death, as the people settled down, some began adopting elements of the life style of pagan neighbors. Matters began to go badly for Israel. Judges 2:16 says that Yahweh *raised up judges* to deliver the people. The narratives about the judges focus on those human leaders, but it is clearly Yahweh who is in control. Some judges are better known than others; Samson is an example. For now, read the story of Gideon, **Judges 6, 7**. Note the dramatic way in which the narrative emphasizes the part Yahweh played in the deliverance.

Deliverance in Samuel's Time

Samuel is sometimes referred to as the last of the judges and the first of the prophets. His career marks a transition in the national life of the Israelites. Their enemies in this period were the Philistines, who inhabited the southwestern part of what came to be known as "Palestine" (today roughly the coastal plain of Israel from Jaffa to Gaza).¹ Samuel was God's designated leader for Israel at this time. At one point the Philistines captured Israel's sacred *ark of the covenant*,² but it brought them such bad fortune that they returned it.

Read **1 Samuel 7**. The ark was the sacred chest that came to symbolize Yahweh's presence among the people. Samuel gathered Israel for national penitence and renewal. Again the Philistines moved against Israel, but the LORD scared them away! Samuel celebrated the occasion by setting up a memorial stone, which he named *Ebenezer*. (What does the name mean? Your Bible will probably have a footnote for 7:12.)

A local hero named Saul rose to be king of Israel (See 1 Samuel 9, 10). Notice Samuel's words in 10:1, *You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around*. The narratives about subsequent deliverances make it clear that the LORD was the deliverer, who saved the people by the hands of the kings. After a victory over the Ammonites, Saul declared, *today the LORD has brought deliverance to Israel* (1 Samuel 11:13).

The same theme persists when David became king after Saul. For example, 2 Samuel 22 contains a *song on the day when the LORD delivered David from the hand of all his enemies*. Psalm 18, which is attributed to David, is almost identical with this song.³

Elijah and Elisha

Deliverance of the people was not always from an outside threat. Under a later king named Ahab, worship of the pagan god Baal threatened Israel's faith. Ahab's queen,

1 These people had immigrated earlier from the Aegean basin, and their culture was quite different from Israel's. It is ironic that the name "Palestine" is derived from a Greek form of "Philistia."

2 The making of this ark is recounted in Exodus 25:10-22.

3 The time of David's reign is about 1000 BC.

Jezebel, from the Phoenician city of Sidon, worshiped Baal and influenced Ahab to promote that worship. The prophet Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel in the presence of a great assembly. Read the story in **1 Kings 18:17-39**. It was a great victory for Yahweh.

Other stories about Elijah's conflict with Ahab and Jezebel illustrate the truth that God saves individuals as well as a people.⁴ In 1 Kings 17 when Elijah was running from Ahab, God saved the prophet in the wilderness by sending *ravens* to feed him. Then he was directed to stay with a widow in the village of Zarephath, near the Mediterranean seacoast in Phoenician territory. It was a time of famine, but Yahweh extended the widow's supply of oil and meal to save her and Elijah. After the victory on Mount Carmel, Elijah ran away again, but Yahweh sustained him and gave him new orders (see 1 Kings 19).

Dramatic stories of Yahweh's power to save continue with Elisha, Elijah's successor. Read **2 Kings 5:1-14**. Note that Naaman, like the widow of Zarephath, was not an Israelite. Two other startling stories are told in 2 Kings 6:8-7:20, where the LORD's protection of Israel and the prophet is vividly illustrated.

From our perspective these were grim times. Yahweh may sometimes seem to be vengeful, even terrible. Remember that the records interpret the events as the people perceived them. Gradually, with the later prophets and finally with Jesus Christ, it became clearer that God saves because God loves. God dealt with Israel in ways that the people could understand. We must try to understand those times in their terms.

For Further Study and Reflection

Memory Bank

1. Retell in your own words the story of:
 - a) Gideon
 - b) Elijah at Mount Carmel.

⁴ God's care of an individual, however, always is shown in the context of a community.

Research

1. In a Bible atlas or other resources find information about the settlement of the tribes of Israel in Palestine.
2. Investigate the history and culture of the Philistines.
3. Find New Testament references to
 - a) Elijah and the widow
 - b) Elisha and Naaman.
4. Again make a simple outline of events covered in this part.

Reflection

1. Judges 17:6 and 21:25 read “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” What does this imply about the people’s perception of God’s deliverance? What does it suggest about some of the more gruesome stories in the book of Judges? What does it suggest about a nation’s morality?
2. What kinds of deliverance may a nation today expect from God? Under what circumstances?