



January 16

## ***THE NEW SHOFAR***

*We are saved – but what does that mean?  
Jesus was sent to bring salvation to the world?*

***Salvation = the state of having been saved and, the process of being saved***

We will always struggle to understand important insights of the Bible when we read it in English because it is almost impossible to make word-for-word translations. A word in English often has different meanings to the way it was used in the original Hebrew texts. At best we can approximate the meaning, and good translators will do just that. It also explains why English translations can vary so widely and why it is always helpful to have at least two different versions when we are studying.

Isaiah today speaks of *salvation* coming to the people of Israel. Their exile in Babylon has come to an end and they are preparing for a renewed life in the land of Canaan, a restoration of the City of God, Jerusalem. God declares how he will not rest until *her salvation dawns for her like a blazing torch*. But what is “salvation”?

***Salvation is something God alone gifts to the world***

There are elements of the verb *to cry for help* found in the Hebrew word *salvation*. The people turn to God in their helplessness, in their need. They are aware of their limitations and know that there are many, many situations for which they have no answer, in which they can find no hope of resolution. In acknowledging their needs, they are also acknowledging the willingness of God to reach out to them.

There is another important element behind the word *salvation*. It does not promise being saved from peril, delivered from the darkness and woes coming their way. What God does instead is provide a safe space for the faithful believer. He gives them room so that they can find rest and restoration. Then, from that space of divine refreshment, they are able to take the next steps forward.

This is why the verb to save always has Yahweh as its subject. It is always only God who saves. It is only in secular settings that the same verb is used of being delivered from some accident, or illness, removed from the disastrous situation and kept safe. In those situations people cry out “help me”. Spiritual salvation is the guarantee of the divine presence in the midst of trials. The threats may continue, and the sufferings go on, but hope and consolation comes from knowing that with God present alongside of them, things will always turn out for the good, in the end. In those situations, the cry is “God save me” for God is my help.

***Saving is what God does, who God is***

It is informative to follow through the range of meanings that come with the Hebrew word “salvation” as they tell us much about the way God inter-relates with his faithful children. These include: to watch over, defend, support, heal, rise, raise up, pull out, remember, give room to, answer. My personal favourite is *to give room to*. God comes between us and the life “challenge” putting us under threat. God comes to all struggling men and women of faith *like a light (Isa 49:6)*. As it was in creation, God introduces light into our blackness and hope is enkindled. Furthermore, the prophet proclaims God to be like *walls or ramparts round a beleaguered city (Isa 26:1)*. The images are significant. God does not remove us from all peril. Rather, he gives light, a safe place in our darkness.

The prophet continues with the God of salvation being referred to as our *well of salvation; our rock of salvation, the joy of your salvation*. In this, the Hebrew offers further comfort and consolation in that for God, *salvation* is both an individual act – God saves me at this particular time, in this particular moment of stress and suffering – and as well, an ongoing engagement with us. This salvation in which we rejoice is a permanent state of being...*my salvation is ongoing, forever...my salvation continues down through every generation to come (Isa 51:6,8)*.

### ***All we need to be doing is giving God a chance to be God to us***

Strangely, there are very few references to this Hebrew understanding of salvation to be found in the Gospels – though the name *Jesus* comes from the same word. It is, however, found frequently in Paul. For him those Old Testament ideas are picked up in his phrase *inherit the Kingdom of God*. It is the opposite to death and darkness and represents a state of living in which we are invited to share in Christ

For the New Testament writers, the message that comes to us throughout the whole of Scripture is clear. Yahweh our God not only will fight for us, but is, day in and day out, by our side *giving us space* so that we are able to bring an abundance of heavenly graces to bear on what ever it is threatening our peace and our lives.

But here is the difficult part. We have a taste of all this in the Exodus when the people are fleeing and come to the insurmountable obstacle of the Red Sea. Impossible to cross. Then, looking back, they could see the army of Pharaoh racing towards them. They were doomed. What they were then commanded to do was to *stand firm and Yahweh will fight for you; just be still*. Sure enough, they are protected by *an angel of God and a pillar of fire*. Why did they fret and worry so painfully? Their salvation was not in them being freed from Egypt. Their salvation was God being with them, protecting them, empowering them as they went through the process of walking and following God’s lead. Rather than taking their lives into their own hands, they waited for the Lord, and he brought them to Canaan. So, are we saved? Or, do we expect instead, God to prove he is truly God by rescuing us?