



The Sovereign Lord Who Provides

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INTRODUCTION

The Babylonian empire reached the peak of its power under King Nebuchadnezzar II when he ruled over all of Mesopotamia, from the Mediterranean on the west to the Persian Gulf on the east. Nebuchadnezzar was a feared general and consummate builder who created the largest city on earth at the time. Babylon was an architectural masterpiece. It contained one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, the hanging gardens. The city walls were wide enough for eight horses to ride side by side on top.

But Nebuchadnezzar had a fatal weakness. He failed to acknowledge his dominion was a gift from God. In Daniel 4:30, he cries out from the roof of his royal palace, "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built by my mighty power as a royal residence and for the glory of my majesty?" The prophet Daniel, who served in the court of Babylon, writes in the very next verse:

"While the words were still in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven, 'O King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has departed from you, and you shall be driven from among men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. And you shall be made to eat grass like an ox, and seven periods of time shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will'" (Daniel 4:31-32).

The history of the world has witnessed some massive empires – the Romans, the Mongols, the Ottomans, the British. Babylon ranks with the best of them. Yet, what does Scripture assert in response to every glimpse of human authority and power at its greatest? The Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whom he will.

Isaiah 40:22-24, "It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble." The Most High rules the kingdom of men.



That's exactly what the original recipients of the book of Deuteronomy needed to hear. The primary author, Moses, is about to die. His successor, Joshua, will soon command Israel to cross the Jordan river and take possession of the land of Canaan. The Israelites failed to enter the same land 38 years earlier. They saw the strength of the cities and armies and gave into fear. They refused to obey the Lord. The sermons in Deuteronomy are Moses' way of preparing them for round two.

So what does he do? He reminds them what they must not do by recounting the saga of their unbelief in chapter 1. But, he also points them toward what they should do instead. Rest in God's power to provide. Why? Because he is utterly sovereign over the affairs of men. That's the main point of the passage before us in Chapter 2. **Rest in God's power to provide because he is utterly sovereign over the affairs of men.**

We need the same exhortation today, my friends. We need to remember the sovereign authority of God – not so we can check a theological box but so we will lean the weight of our life on the Lord who holds our past, present, and future in his hands. Israel needed to trust him. We need to trust him. Moses points us to several expressions of his sovereignty in Israel's life and our own.

1) GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE PERSISTENCE OF HIS GRACE

After Israel refused to enter the Promised Land, the Lord sent her into the wilderness. Deuteronomy 1:40, "But as for you, turn, and journey into the wilderness in the direction of the Red Sea." It was an act of divine discipline, a direct result of her disobedience. Moses' observation in Deut 2:1 that she went "In the direction of the Red Sea" is insightful. The wilderness wasn't a step forward in embracing the freedom and joy of God's will for her life. It was a step backward toward slavery in Egypt.

Sin always works like that. It promises life and delivers a wilderness. For "Many days," verse 1 says, she traveled around Mount Seir. Scorching heat by day. Brutal cold by night. Blowing sand as far as the eye could see. It was a literal desert. And we're not talking for weeks. We're talking for decades. The consequences of sin, of disobeying the Lord, are real, friends. Even in this life. There are rich blessings for doing life God's way and painful sorrows when we refuse.

Eventually, however, the Lord says to Moses, verse 3, "You have been traveling around this mountain country long enough. Turn northward and command the people..." Yes, they're experiencing the consequences of their sin. But they never escaped God's



watchful eye. He knew exactly how long they had been in the wilderness. And even in the wilderness, he continued to guide and speak to Israel through the gift of his Word.

When you're experiencing the painful consequences of sin or a foolish choice in your life, how do you think about God? We tend to think either God has left the building or we kicked him out through our disobedience. I had my chance and I blew it. Now I guess I'll have to create a little repentance resumé and wait for him to show up again.

Friend, even in the wilderness, God is eager to speak to you through the pages of his Word. Do not say to yourself, "I'll get back to reading my Bible after I turn my life around." No. We need God's Word more, not less, in seasons of divine discipline when we are prone to throw in the spiritual towel, so to speak. That's when God delights to speak, guide, orient, and comfort us through his Word just like he did for Israel.

Do you know what lay to the north, through the mountain country of Edom? It was the land of Canaan. When God tells Moses, "Turn northward," he isn't just giving directions. He's saying, "Israel, I'm not done with you. I haven't forgotten my promises. I will finish the good work I began."

In verse 4-5, the Lord gives Israel specific instructions for how she is to conduct herself as she approaches the land of the Edomites, the people of Esau. Don't take advantage of them or fight with them. Buy whatever food and water you need. Why? Verse 5, "For I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession."

In the Ancient Near East, most people believed in tribal deities. They called the shots within their geographic borders. In contrast, what does the Lord assert about himself? "I am in complete control of everyone and everything in every corner of the universe! The Edomites have their land because I gave it to them. I am the Sovereign One who created all things, sustains all things, and rules all things." Yahweh, the God of Israel, is not a tribal deity. He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

What's the implication? What God refuses to give, we cannot receive. "Don't try to take Edom for yourself, Israel." "Why not?" "Because I'm not giving it to you, not even the smallest sliver." I love that! God isn't just sovereign in the big picture stuff. He's sovereign in the details. He controls the little things, the "Sole of your foot" sized boundaries where we quickly forget the sweet comfort of providence. The fact that your car won't start, your job application was denied, or you got stuck in traffic on the way to the beach. God controls those things too, my friend.



So often we chase or “Contend” for stuff in this life as if through the sheer force of our will we can get whatever we want – the money, the home, the friends, the relationship, the recognition. We push harder. We work longer. We manipulate other people. What have we forgotten? That we are not master of our fate. God is. You can try with all your might to assert your own will. It will not work, friend. You are not sovereign. You cannot prevail against the Lord of Host. What God refuses to give, we cannot receive.

But here’s the good news. He is not a cold, distant, or uninvolved sovereign. He expresses his power in the lives of his chosen people through persistent blessing! Look at verse 7. Why did Israel have enough money, enough purchasing power, to get whatever food or water they needed in Edom? “For the LORD your God has blessed you in all the work of your hands...”

Say what? I thought the wilderness was a season of discipline, not blessing? It was a season of discipline. Yet throughout the whole experience, what did God do? He continued to care for his people. Steadfast love and fatherly discipline went hand in hand. While Israel was still experiencing the consequences of their sin, the Lord continued to shower them with undeserved favor.

Sometimes we think God has two modes – displeasure or favor, discipline or blessing. We break our lives into spiritual categories accordingly. We say things like, “Last year was a season of discipline, but this year has been a real season of blessing.” From a circumstantial standpoint, I know what you mean. But remember two things, Christian. First, the Lord disciplines those he loves. Second, God delights to lavish steadfast love upon us even while we’re experiencing the consequences of our disobedience.

He did it for Israel in 3 ways. **First, he kept watch over them.** Verse 7, “He knows your going through this great wilderness.” Even in the desert, he remained the God who sees. The God who understands. He knew the magnitude of their suffering, no details excluded. Take heart in that, Christian! You can pour out your sorrows to him even if you brought them upon yourself. God knows. He is not unconcerned or unaware. You cannot escape his watchful gaze and fatherly concern.

Second, he remained with them. Verse 7, “These forty years the LORD your God has been with you...” Even when Israel refused to obey, God didn’t abandon them. He didn’t say, “Give me a call when you’re interested in relationship again. I’ll give waiting over here.” No. He never left. He never withdrew. He’s a merciful and exceedingly patient Father. It was hot, it was hard, it was painful, and God was with them the entire time.



How much more is he with you, Christian! If you are trusting Jesus, not your good works, to make you right with God, the Holy Spirit has taken up residence within you. You are a temple of the Living God. And though our awareness of his presence may lessen when we sin, the reality of his presence does not.

Third, God provided for them. Verse 7, “You have lacked nothing.” He gave them manna to eat. He gave them water to drink. Deuteronomy 8 says even their clothing didn’t wear out, nor did their feet swell. When God is present, he’s more than a sympathetic friend. He’s the Sovereign Lord who provides for those who do not deserve his favor. Luke 6:35, “For he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.”

The consequences of sin are real, even in this life. But if you are in Christ, they are not the final story. Your sin, no matter how scandalous, no matter how much it leads you into the wilderness, cannot dethrone the Holy One. He reigns. And he expresses his sovereignty in our lives through the persistence of his grace – a grace that watches, remains, and provides.

2) GOD’S SOVEREIGNTY IS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE CERTAINTY OF HIS JUDGMENT

We know from Numbers 20 that when Israel sought permission to travel through the land of Edom, the Edomites refused. Verse 9, so they “Went in the direction of the wilderness of Moab.” They’re still going north, albeit by a longer and more difficult route. And when they finally enter Moab at the brook Zered, Moses says something critically important. Verse 14, “And time from our leaving Kadesh-barnea until we crossed the brook Zered was thirty-eight years, until the entire generation, that is, the men of war, had perished from the camp, as the LORD had sworn to them.”

What did the Lord tell Israel would happen when all her men of military age, save two, refused to enter Canaan at Kadesh-barnea? Deuteronomy 1:35, “Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land that I swore to give to your fathers.” They would all die in the wilderness for refusing to believe and obey God’s Word.

Imagine watching an entire generation of men fade away over the next 38 years. One after another. The desert was riddled with graves. All the while knowing more was at work than the natural process of aging. It was an expression of the righteous judgment of God. Verse 15, “For the hand of the LORD was against them, to destroy them from the camp, until they had perished.”



How does that square with the persistence of God's blessing back in verse 7? Remember two things. First, there's an important sense in which God deals with his people as a collective whole. The sins of some impact the life of the entire body, both for Israel back then and the church today. Second, there's a sense in which God also deals with his people as individuals. Each one of us must stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for our life. That was true back then. It's still true today.

We have to keep both aspects in view as we evaluate God's dealings with Israel. In a collective sense, did they all experience the Lord's discipline in the form of 40 years in the wilderness? Yes. And in a collective sense, did God's steadfast love never depart from them? Yes. But at the individual level, what happened? The first generation that refused to believe and obey the Lord died under the judgment of God. Save Caleb and Joshua, only the children survived.

God's ways haven't changed. Then and now, the smile of his favor, the joy of life in his presence, is only received through the obedience of faith. That's what it means to be a Christian! A Christian isn't someone who identifies with a particular religion or goes to church on Sundays. A Christian is someone who turns away from their sin to trust and obey Jesus.

Do genuine Christians still sin? Yes. But sin is no longer the direction of your life. The spiritual pattern in your life is the obedience of faith. Where the obedience of faith is present, not perfectly, but genuinely, you can rest in knowing that even when you sin and experience the Lord's discipline, God will continue to pour out his grace upon you. Israel's collective story in verse 7 is your individual story.

But what if you, like the first generation, refuse? What if the pattern in your life is not the obedience of faith? What if it's unbelief? A persistent refusal to trust God's Word and do what he says? What if Jesus is nothing more in your heart than an inspiring teacher or someone your parents think is important? What then?

Hear me, friend. The wilderness filled with bodies is a foretaste of the judgment waiting for you. This chapter is a gracious word of warning. You will be called to account by God no less than they were. And unless you choose to repent, God is not for you. He is righteously and justly against you. He will express his sovereign power through the certainty of his judgment in your life.



The same judgment that fell on Egypt, destroying their firstborn, drowning Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, fell on unbelieving Israel. Why? Because God doesn't play favorites. The first generation wasn't spared on account of their ethnicity. Nor will you be, friend, simply because your neighbors think you're a good person or you grew up going to church. God knows better. He sees your heart. He sees your thoughts. You can hide from men. You cannot hide from God.

Everything you have done in secret will be revealed. Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead. And if you die apart from Christ, you will close your eyes on earth only to open them and realize it's too late. Your fate is sealed. Your future is certain. You will spend the rest of your days, the rest of eternity, with no end and no possibility of escape, suffering under the unrelenting wrath of God.

A wilderness littered with dead bodies reminds us we are not playing when we gather on Sunday morning. This isn't a game. This isn't a self-improvement opportunity. This is a matter of life and death. I shudder when I think of how easy it is to saunter into church, shake a few hands, and go watch football without giving the slightest consideration to the eternal realities at stake.

The God we've been singing about? He's not a figment of the imagination of men. He's the Righteous Judge with whom we all must do, men and women, young and old. You are accountable to him. I am accountable to him. Do not leave this room without giving sober, measured consideration to the condition of your soul. Whether you respond to the certainty of God's judgment on account of your sin by fleeing to Jesus is a deadly serious matter. I plead with you, turn to him and be saved! God's sovereignty is expressed through the certainty of his judgment.

3) GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS EXPRESSED THROUGH THE GIFT OF A DWELLING PLACE

In verse 18, Moses recounts the Lord's instruction to leave the land of Moab and continue going north into the territory of the Ammonites. He basically repeats the same instruction he gave for the previous two border crossings. Verse 19, "And when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession."

Why does the Lord repeat the same command in verse 5 with the Edomites, in verse 8 with the Moabites, and verse 19 with the Ammonites? And why does Moses bother to



recount the command in detail every time the Lord gave it? There are plenty of other instructions the Lord gave Israel in the wilderness. Why highlight these commands in the prologue of Deuteronomy? I think there are several reasons.

First, the repeated instruction points to God’s sovereignty over the nations. He’s not a disengaged Creator. As Paul says in Acts 17:26, for every people on the face of the earth, God determines the “allotted periods and boundaries of their dwelling place.” The Moabites patron god, Chemosh, didn’t give them their land. The Lord did! The Edomites didn’t displace the Horites on a whim. Verse 22, “[The Lord] destroyed the Horites before them and they dispossessed them and settled in their place.”

He exercises the same power today, brothers and sisters. There’s not an empire on earth – past, present, or future – that can expand their territory apart from the sovereign will of God. Power-hunger men are not calling the shots. The Lord reigns.

Second, the repeated instruction confronts us with the specificity of the Lord’s provision. The command to not conquer certain lands was an implicit exhortation to wait for the place God had ordained for them. He refused to allow Israel to treat him as a pizza delivery guy, to choose whatever land suited their fancy, and then ask God to “Help” them get it.

We need to hear the same exhortation, brothers and sisters. There’s a world of difference between using God to satisfy our desires and aligning our desires with his will. For example, when we pray, should we ask God to give us whatever we want? No, we align our requests with his will by praying what he teaches us to pray in his Word.

Scripture is where God defines the borders, boundaries, and nature of his provision in our lives. This is what a godly husband or wife looks like. This is what a biblical church looks like. This is what a faithful friend looks like. This is what pleasing the Lord with our sexuality looks like. And having received his Word, we must humbly choose to be content with his provision, seeking to possess only what the Lord is eager to give, lest we be found opposing the Almighty.

The God who reigns over the nations, giving land to one, and a different land to another, had prepared a particular land for Israel. But what does the Promised Land of Canaan ultimately point toward? Something immeasurably greater than a region in the Middle East. It points forward to the new heaven and the new earth, the home Jesus will provide for his people on the day he returns.



That's the place God has prepared for us, brother and sisters. In the same way God called Israel to not act as if Edom or Moab or Ammon was their home, so too we must remember this world is not our home. America isn't our place. The nation-state of Israel isn't our place. Philippians 3:20, "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ..." So much of our discontentment in this life is rooted in demanding heaven on earth. Remember this isn't your home, Christian. The Lord has prepared an exceedingly good land for you to dwell in.

Finally, the repeated instruction equips us to walk by faith. The parenthetical remark in verses 20-23 is strikingly similar to the parenthetical remark in verse 10-12. Notice one phrase in particular. Who did the Moabites dispossess when God gave them their land? According to verse 10, it was the Emim, "A people great and many, and tall as the Anakim." Who did the Ammonites dispossess when God gave them their land? According to verse 21, it was the Zamzummim, "A people great and many, and tall as the Anakim, but the LORD destroyed them before the Ammonites."

Do you remember what sort of fear drove the first generation into unbelief? Deuteronomy 1:28, "Our brothers have made our hearts melt, saying, 'The people are greater and taller than we. The cities are great and fortified up to heaven. And besides, we have been the sons of the Anakim there.'" The Anakim were a race of giant men, men like Goliath.

So why is Moses bringing them up? Because he wants Israel to realize God has already defeated the very enemies she most feared 38 years prior. He did it for the Moabites. They took out the Anakim. He did it for the Ammonites. They took out the Anakim. If God would do as much for two pagan nations of idolaters, how much more would he do so for Israel, the people he chose and redeemed for himself!

As we prepare again to enter the land, Israel, look around! Look at what God did for Edom. Look at what God did for Moab. Look at what God did for Ammon. Behold the sovereign power of your God. His arm is not too short. The sovereign power that cared for you in the wilderness, the sovereign power that judged the first generation, is the same sovereign power that has already defeated the enemies you fear and will surely bring you into the land.



CONCLUSION

My friends, our Sovereign King has done immeasurably more for us than destroy a fearsome race of giants. He has defeated the enemy of sin and death through his triumph at the cross. With his victory in view, press on toward your heavenly home. Do not lose heart, rest in God's power to provide. He is able to bring you into the land. Why? Because he is utterly sovereign over the affairs of men.

Through the persistence of his grace, through the certainty of his judgment, our God prevails. He prevails over the activities of nations. He prevails in the details of our individual lives. When you consider your life, rest in God's power to provide. When you consider your family, rest in God's power to provide. When you consider our church, rest in God's power to provide. When you consider our country, rest in God's power to provide.

Trust him and keep on trusting him until the day our faith becomes sight.