

**Message from the Master**, Broadcast Date: **April 6, 2008**

**Sermon Series:** The Lord Provides

**This Sermon:** The Lord Provides (Deuteronomy 8:1-9)

**Speaker:** Forrest Bivens

Roger Williams, a champion of religious toleration in colonial America, was an obviously religious man. When he was banished from the religiously intolerant Massachusetts colony and ultimately founded the Rhode Island colony, he did so with the full admission that he owed his life and everything else to God. When he named the main settlement of his new colony Providence, he was giving God credit for his preservation and livelihood. Providence, Rhode Island, through its very name, continues to testify to divine protection and preservation in the life of its founder. The sermon series that we begin this morning also seeks to highlight God's providence in the lives of his creatures. The sermon series bears the title, "The Lord Provides" and will present God's providing work from seven similar yet different perspectives. Our emphasis today, based on the opening nine verses of Deuteronomy chapter eight, is on God's wise providence as he furthers the physical and spiritual lives of his people. Here, then, is our Bible text, the opening verses of Deuteronomy 8:

**Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land that the Lord promised on oath to your forefathers. <sup>2</sup> Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands. <sup>3</sup> He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. <sup>4</sup> Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you. <sup>6</sup> Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him. <sup>7</sup> For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.**

As is true of most of Deuteronomy, these words are addressed to the second generation of Israelites who were brought out of Egypt and out of slavery to inherit the Promised Land of Canaan. The unbelief and disobedience of the prior generation had resulted in the familiar forty years of wandering in the wilderness, during which time that generation had died. This new generation grew up during those hard and often frustrating years in the desert, were now adults, and were about to cross the Jordan River to possess and enjoy the Promised Land. The gracious Lord God who had provided for them and who would continue to provide for them invites the people to look back and look forward to his providence. Not only **what** he does for them but also **how** he goes about doing it should be remembered and appreciated. So God is calling them to remember **that** he provides for them and also **how** he provides for them. And he calls us to remember and take to heart the same things.

Let's focus first on precisely what God had done and is about to do for these Israelites as he instructs them to keep it in mind. He says, **Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years . . . . Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. .The Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.** The emphasis is clearly on the physical protection and provision God gives to his people. Despite a harsh and challenging environment, God kept their body and soul together and allowed them to live and enjoy his guidance day by day, to worship him and serve their neighbor in practical ways, all with adequate food, clothing, and bodily protection. And it would be more of the same after they entered the Promised Land and were confronted with hostile Canaanite tribes with large armies and impressively fortified cities. The book of Joshua tells us much of how the Lord who led them in the wilderness would continue to lead them in conquest of the land. Any wall plaque among them that read "The Lord Provides" would have been accurate as they left Egypt, as they entered Canaan, and anytime before, between, or after those events.

And that truth is just as true and comforting today in our lives. What Martin Luther wrote in his explanation to the First Article of the Apostles Creed deserves to be echoed by you, by me, and by all. God has made me and every creature, and gave me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my mind and all my abilities. God still preserves me by richly and daily providing clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, cattle, and all I own, and all that I need to keep my body and life; and by defending me against all danger and guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him.

When was the last time we sat down with our families and just reflected upon our journey together up to this point in time? When was the last time we dug out the old photo albums and relived birthdays, vacations, graduations, and similar milestones of our pilgrimage on earth? Most of us don't take near enough reflection time. We are so busy keeping up with the demands of our hectic schedules that we don't slow down long enough to consider the full meaning of our experiences. When we join Moses and the Israelites to take a stroll down memory lane, alert to God's provision, there is blessing. It's not just a sentimental journey. It's instructive. It's a reminder of what God did and how the Lord our God led us all the way to the present – and with promises for the future. The truth will not change: The Lord Provides!

Let's go back to Deuteronomy 8 to see a second truth worth remembering. Divine providence for our physical life is not easily separated from spiritual lessons to be learned as well. For the Israelites, their journey to this point was not just about yesterday or even just about provision for tomorrow. It is also about HOW God leads and provides for the people. Here is the Lord's own description of the way he went about this task: **the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you. He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known,**

**to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. . . . Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.**

The way God led these people is very instructive. It was a purposeful mixture of difficulty and divine intervention—both hunger and provision. On the one hand, God allowed these people to suffer hunger. He led them in a wilderness—not a paradise, not a land filled with milk and honey but a dry, dusty desert. In verse 15 of this same chapter Moses adds to the description by saying, “He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions.” And he led the people on a day to day basis – teaching them each day they were dependent on him and each day showing them he was faithful and sufficient to meet their needs. In this way he provided for their spiritual needs alongside their physical needs, shifting their attention from themselves to him, from their problems to his provision. He was treating the people as people with souls as well as bodies, who needed food and nourishment for their spirits as well as their stomachs.

As you and I live out our lives as pilgrims on earth headed for the Promised Land of heaven, we observe that God deals with us in a very parallel way in both physical and spiritual matters. He teaches us to pray, “Give us today our daily bread” and often meets our needs in ways that remind us how dependent we are on him. And then there’s the parallel way he provides for sinner’s spiritual needs. If we ask WHAT does God graciously supply for sinners? We happily answer that through Jesus Christ God gives everything the sinner really needs: a Savior from sin, the forgiveness of sins, the power to say No to sin, and the promise of perfect freedom from sin in glory. Sinners have been given a Savior who lived the kind of life we should have but couldn’t and didn’t. Sinners have been given a Savior who died the kind of God-forsaken death we should have experienced, but no longer have to because he did it for us. Sinners have received full and free forgiveness and have been declared not guilty in God’s eyes. In a word, The Lord Provides! And now, if we ask HOW God brings these amazing gifts to us personally, we notice it is through a carefully chosen blend of bad news and good news, of law and gospel, of reminders of sin and guilt and defeat coupled with reminders of grace and power and victory. On a daily and continuous basis God delights in bringing us low through preachments of sin and the thundering of his law. He is teaching us how we are unable to save ourselves. He is instructing us to look to him, trust him, and cherish the provision he gives to us. We need spiritual salvation and health of the soul as desperately as we need physical preservation and health of the body. And we receive these needed blessings from the bountiful hand of God, along with daily lessons of how we depend on his amazing grace. The Lord teaches us all this while he meets those needs and provides life that is truly life.

What the Lord gives to us and the way he gives it to us reflect the Lord’s intimate understanding of how dangerous we can be for ourselves. We have such a strong inclination to self-centered pride and a forgetfulness concerning divine blessings. God knew this about the Israelites. Later in this same chapter God gives this advice: “When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and

when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”

God loves us so much that he provides what we need, and does this in such a way that we remember where all good gifts come from. We learn again why God gives them to us, and how we might best honor him with our gratitude and faithful use of the gifts. The Lord provides all this, richly and daily. Naturalists tell us that the buffalo or bison is made in such a way that its natural inclination is to look down and focus on the grass it eats. The design of its neck makes it difficult for the bison to look up. In contrast, the giraffe is designed in a way that makes looking up easy. The way its neck is made leads it to eat leaves from branches above. It is more difficult for a giraffe to look down. And what about us human beings? We are well equipped to focus on things below, on physical needs and bodily concerns – and at the same time to look up to God and take note of how he provides what we need when we need it. We are doubly blessed.

May the Lord richly blessing the following studies that will be centered in the Lord who provides. And let us always be alert to both what he provides for us and how he goes about doing that. We are doubly blessed in both body and soul. Therefore we praise him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, giver of every good gift, you provide all that we need for body and soul. Forgive our forgetfulness, pardon our sinful pride that too often fails to sing your praises and give you thanks. Point us each day to our need for the Savior and to your strong and saving love in Jesus Christ. Into your hands we commend ourselves, body and soul and all things, trusting your perfect provision for us. Also hear us as we join to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.