

God's Providence in Difficult Times

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

Intro

If you go to the movies you will notice that at the end when the credits come on almost everyone leaves. It is sometimes interesting to watch the credits though, because you tend to notice something.

First of all, maybe one of your heroes has been on the screen jumping from tall buildings and shooting up the bad guys. And how easily convinced we become of our hero's invincible qualities and indestructible hairdo - that is until we read the credits. There we discover that our hero did not get a scratch in his acting. It is all a charade. The real dangerous acting was done by stunt people, the real guys who do the hard work in the film.

The truth is that our great actors are only skin deep at best and they are made for the media by teams of people who make them far larger than life. We buy into it! Our entertainment driven culture embraces celebrities that we forget that many of them are merely a production project. Credits, which could give us perspective on what is going on behind the scenes, are forgotten. We're in it for the show – not much else.

Human nature is like that - we tend to be in it for the show and we forget who made it possible. God is always working in the background making things possible without people even being aware of it. It's called providence. I believe in God's providence, not in chance or fate. What is God's providence?

God's Providence

Divine providence is the governance of God by which He, with wisdom and love, cares for and directs all things in the world and universe. Divine providence asserts that God is in complete control of all things. He is sovereign over the universe as a whole (Psalm 103:19), the physical world (Matthew 5:45), the affairs of nations (Psalm 66:7), human destiny (Galatians 1:15), human successes and failures (Luke 1:52), and the protection of His people (Psalm 4:8). God's providence stands in direct opposition to the idea that the universe is governed by chance, luck or fate.

Deuteronomy 8 Background

Deuteronomy 8 talks about God's providence over His people, even when they didn't see it. Israel had traveled through the wilderness for 40 years, on the journey, and an entire generation had died of old age. The predominant factor of the wilderness experience was God's unending provision through those 40 years in the wilderness.

Manna fell from heaven daily. All they had to do was gather it and not too much lest it spoil. Water burst forth from solid rock to give them drink in a desert wasteland. It was an impossibility they could not take credit for. It's not pretty, but it's an amazing picture. Imagine 40 years of wearing the same shoes, the same jeans, the same shirts. Their clothing did not wear out. 40 years of walking and their feet did not swell from arthritis or water retention. It was so very obvious to Israel that God, and only God, had made it possible for a nation of people to survive those 40 years of wilderness travel.

We read in Exodus 12:37 that there were “*600,000 men on foot, besides women and children.*” That would be over 3 million people! Can you imagine feeding and sustaining 3 million people in the desert? Wow!

But God did it. It was a miracle of God's power and sustenance. God didn't want them to forget who made it all possible for their survival.

In Deuteronomy 8 they stood at the edge of the Promised Land, the land of their dreams, and the warning was that they not forget who made this all possible. Now that the show was starting, they were not to forget who made it possible.

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

Verse 1 *"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."*

The commandments were given for the good of God's people. The following passages explain:

Deut. 6:24-25 *"The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. 25 And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us, that will be our righteousness."*

God's desire was to see his people prosper and live long.

Deut. 10:12-13 *"And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?"*

God wants his people to live a wholesome life.

God's commands were given to protect and keep his people – it was for their good, their well-being.

"Posses the land" means possess the promise, the blessing.

Purpose of the Test

Verse 2 *"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."*

There was a divine purpose for God's people to be in the wilderness for 40 years.

1/ To humble his people

2/ To test the heart for obedience

"To humble"

They were to remember and learn that they were to be humble and rely on the Lord. It is easy to turn away from God and follow after other gods and God humbled his people to truly trust and rely on him for everything even the food that sustained them in the wilderness for 40 years.

When we are in need we tend to go to God.

God humbles us so that we may trust him completely and rely on his providential care and guidance.

In Psalm 26:2 David says, *"Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind."*

WHY? Why did David ask for God to try him and test him?

In Psalm 139:23-24 David elaborates, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*

The testing of God is to purify us and to bring out the godly character, the character of Christ in us. God desires to change us more and more into the image of his Son.

Also the heart needs to be tested because it is easily deceived.

In Jeremiah 17:9-10 it says, *“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? “I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve.”*”

God tests the heart. He knows the heart and his testing is not designed to find out something he does not know, but rather to bring into the open that which is hidden to us. It is for his glory and justification and for the good of those who are his.

Verse 3 *“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.”*

While they grumbled in the wilderness, God fed them. God caused them to hunger, showed them that not only were their stomachs empty, but so were their hearts. But despite their anger at God, he fed them. The food they received was manna, which means *“What is this stuff?”* - Not much different than what some kids say every night at the dinner table. Despite grumbling, God provides with something no one ever suspected.

Manna came from the mouth of God – the very spoken word of God. God desired to sustain his people by his word.

Manna came into being through the power of his word.

The Lord wanted his people to trust in him to supply their needs.

We do not live by bread alone – material things alone, but by the very word of God.

It takes more than bread to stay alive, it takes the word of God.

Jesus quoted this truth when he was tempted and tested in the wilderness (Matt. 4).

Verse 4 *“Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.”*

During those 40 years their clothing and their physical bodies were preserved through God’s power and care.

God desired to take care of his people. Why?

Because they are precious to him and he loves them with an everlasting love.

Through times of testing God providentially cares for his people. He never forsakes nor leaves them. He is there always watching over us even when we think he is not.

Verse 5 *“Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.”*

The testing of God is also a time of discipline. He wants the best in us. He is preparing us for heaven.

Hebrews 12:5-7, 10, 11 teaches this very truth. Look at it with me:

“5 And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: “My son, do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6 because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son.” 7 Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?... 10 Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. 11 No discipline seems pleasant at the time,

but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”

Conclusion

The hymn: *God Moves in a Mysterious Way*, was written by William Cowper. Here are the lyrics,

*God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

Here is a story that is said to be behind these incredibly insightful and beautiful words of Cowper's hymn. Reportedly this is the last hymn Cowper ever wrote. Cowper often struggled with depression and doubt. One night he decided to commit suicide by drowning himself. He called a cab and told the driver to take him to the Thames River, in London. However, thick fog came down and prevented them from finding the river. After driving around for a long time and lost the cabby finally stopped and let Cowper out at a random spot. To Cowper's surprise, he found himself on his own doorstep: God had sent the fog to keep him from killing himself. Even in our blackest moments, God watches over us.

His providence is over us! God cares for us. God loves us!