

By Bread Alone

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 0 0] the title of this third sermon in the Deuteronomy series is by bread alone please be seated and you may like to turn to Deuteronomy chapter 8 on page 145 in the pew bibles we're continuing a sermon series through this book of the Old Testament and I shall pray for us our God you teach us that we do not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from your mouth and so we pray that your word may now feed us that we may grow up as mature Christian people trusting in and relying on you and you alone for Jesus sake amen a crisis often pushes people to God and even people who may never pray or may hardly ever have darkened the door of a church will pray in a crisis time and again when I visit people whose lives are in turmoil because of grief or illness even if they've never had anything to do with the church may pray or ask me to pray for them in times of crisis but so often when the crisis is over God seems forgotten with hardly a note of thanks if the prayers are answered that's the sort of issue that's being addressed here in Deuteronomy chapter 8 Israel has experienced a 40 year crisis in the wilderness as it has gone from Egypt to the verge of the promised land the question is how now will they respond to God the crisis is over as they enter the promised land will they have or have they learned the lessons of their crisis how will they respond to God and running through Deuteronomy 8 is a contrast between the past and the future the past was the wilderness the future is the promised land the past was crisis the future is not crisis the past was scarcity of food and drink and the future is abundance in the past there was no water they had to get it from a rock in the future there is plenty of water coming out of the hills and the streams in the past there was no food God provided it miraculously in the in the future there is plenty of food abundant food in the land in the past there was difficulty in the future there will be ease has Israel learned the lessons of the past or not will they apply those lessons in the different situation of the future having learnt lessons in a time of scarcity will they be able to apply the lessons they've learnt in a time of plenty the chapter begins this entire commandment that I command you today you must diligently observe so that you may live and increase and go in and occupy the land that the

Lord promised on oath to your ancestors remember don't forget the past remember the past remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these 40 years in the wilderness why did he do that in order in order to humble you testing you to know what was in your heart whether or not you would keep his commandments the purpose of this 40 year wilderness time was a time of testing a time of trial or one might say a time of discipline verse 5 says know then in your heart that as a parent disciplines a child so the Lord your God disciplines you god is like a parent disciplining his child he's created this time in the wilderness and he's created as a difficult time a testing time he's contrived this crisis for Israel in order to discipline him now we might think that's not the sort of God that we know and yet that's the way that the world is 2021 he's kind of

Now we might think that's not the sort of God that we know, and yet that's the same God of the New Testament. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews says, My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, or lose heart when you are punished by him.

For the Lord disciplines those whom he loves, and chastises every child whom he accepts. That's the nature and character of God, the God who disciplines his people.

And when he disciplines, that is a demonstration of the love of God for us. But Israel's reaction in the wilderness was to complain, to murmur and moan and whinge and grumble, to complain about God and his character and his motives.

[5 : 06] They hadn't even got to the Red Sea and they complained. No sooner had they got through the Red Sea, but they complained and murmured and grumbled and mumbled. They didn't like it. And so they complained.

Next week we'll see a passage in the next chapter of Deuteronomy, where they complained about God and they said, Oh, God just hates us. He's brought us out here to die. That's Israel complaining and mumbling and groaning because of the crisis and the trial that they're enduring.

Now their reaction's not unusual, I think. Because for us too, when things go wrong in life, usually our first response is to complain and grumble.

Why me? It's not fair. God, you've let me down. God, you don't really like me or love me after all. We complain. And we want the situation to change.

So when we get sick, we want prayers for healing. When we lose a job, we pray for a new job. If we lose a spouse, we want immediate comfort. If we fail an exam, we want God to rectify the situation.

[6 : 09] Prayers that, yes, address themselves to a God who is able to change situations and able to provide healing and so on. But in part, prayers that come from a heart that is not satisfied with a situation and wants it to change.

Sometimes prayers of complaint and grumbling. Deuteronomy 8 pushes us in a different direction. It asks us to ask the question, God, what am I to learn from this situation?

God, how is this situation to help me grow in my spiritual faith and maturity? It's not a prayer to change the situation so much as a prayer to learn through the situation.

And yet so often we pray for change in situations rather than prayers for learning and growth in the situations which we face. God, in this crisis, in this difficulty, in this turmoil, how am I to learn and grow in my Christian faith?

Little Johnny, eat your beans. Beans are good for you. Eat them. They'll make you grow up strong. Yuck, says Johnny.

[7 : 34] We all know that scenario, I'm sure. And yet spiritually, this is what's happening here in Deuteronomy 8. God is saying this crisis, this turmoil, this distress is good for you.

Learn from it so that you can grow up not just as an adult but as a spiritually mature Christian adult. That's the same parallel that's going on.

As parents, you know how you discipline and train your children so they grow up to be adults and strong. And God does the same for us spiritually. He brings about difficult situations which we don't necessarily like in order that through them we may grow in maturity and faith and trust.

Verse 16 of this chapter says that God has fed you in the wilderness with manna that your ancestors did not know to humble you and to test you and in the end to do you good.

That's God. And that's his love. And it's the love that disciplines us. The love that trains us in paths of spiritual maturity.

[8 : 45] The example that dominates this chapter is the example of manna in the wilderness in verse 3. God humbled you by letting you hunger really causing you to hunger.

We may think that's not a very nice thing for God to do. He's contriving this situation. He's causing Israel to hunger and then what he does is to feed them with manna.

Now literally the word manna means what is it? That's what the Hebrews called it. They didn't know what it was because every morning in the wilderness they got up and there around them was this food and they said what is it?

Manna. And that's what it was called. And they would eat it and it would sustain them. If they kept any overnight it went rotten. Apart from one night of the week the night before Sabbath day the day of rest.

On that night they could keep it because they would actually collect two days supply so they didn't have to collect any on the Sabbath day and it wouldn't go rotten and it would keep.

[9 : 46] But any other night they collect it and keep it overnight it would go rotten and it wouldn't keep. Now people have delighted to find answers to what is this manna.

It's the sap of the tamarisk tree they say or it's something to do with the dew that falls at night or maybe something to do with insects and something they secrete during the night.

But what fools they are to find such explanations because not one of those explanations answers the question why does it keep only one night of the week but not the night before Sabbath.

You see there's only one answer for what where this manna comes from. It comes from God and God alone. And any other human or natural explanation for it fails.

It is God and it is obviously God. He's contrived the situation to make it abundantly clear that He is the one who's providing it. It's not mother nature at work but it is God's direct provision for His people.

[10 : 50] It's the same with the Red Sea. When Israel came out of Egypt they didn't go the direct route to Palestine. In the end they were confronted by a sea in front of them mountains behind them a desert to one side of them and Pharaoh's army coming down behind them.

They were stuck. There was nowhere to go. And as we know the Red Sea parted and they passed through and then the sea closed over Pharaoh's pursuing army. Now scholars again have delighted to try and find explanations for this.

And they say that at a certain time of year when the tides are right and the winds are right the Red Sea will be blown to one side and people can pass across. But what fools again because they don't read the Bible properly because we understand that Israel passed through walls of water on both sides of them and not many winds do that.

God did it. No other answer but God His hand at work. The same with water from a rock. The same with all the other provisions in the wilderness. What had happened there was God stripping away every natural provision and making it abundantly clear that He and He alone was the provider for Israel.

Passing through the Red Sea providing manna providing water from a rock providing every need for Israel in the wilderness it was God and God alone who was the provider. And the point of it all as we read at the end of verse 3 is to know that you live by what God provides.

[12 : 12] It's not saying we live spiritually compared to physical bread when it says that one does not live by bread alone but everything that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. It's not a contrast between the spiritual and the physical. It's saying that in our life physical and spiritual we live because God provides.

It's God who is the source of life. That's what that verse is about. And the experience of Israel in the wilderness was exactly that that God and God alone was the provider of every need.

So it goes on in verse 4 the clothes on your back did not wear out for 40 years they didn't wear out. Some of us change our wardrobes every year but theirs survived 40 years. Not only that but your feet did not swell these 40 years.

That's God and God's provision and there's no other answer. God had stripped away all of Israel's basic provisions.

The normal bread they ate taken away their homes in Egypt taken away their jobs taken away their security indeed taken away their parents because their parent generation died out in the wilderness 40 years.

[13 : 21] All those good things had been taken away by God. Yes they're good things but he took them away in order to address Israel's focus to him. God is the one on whom they're to rely.

Not on their jobs not on their food not on their parents not on their security not on their houses not on their protection not on anything else but on God. And he contrived this situation to direct their attention to him.

Rely on me. Trust me. Because I am the provider. That's what this chapter is about. For many of us I guess in our lives we know times when God has taken away things that are very dearly loved to us.

Things that provide us with great security. No doubt the most difficult times in our life are times when those sorts of things have been taken away. A husband or a wife or a child or a parent.

A house or a job or health security. Taken away our money our investments. Even taken away the way in which we worship at church the things that we find secure.

[14 : 31] Very often our response is to complain. To grumble moan and murmur. But if we pursue that path we end up with bitterness and resentment. And that path leads in the end to loss of faith in a providing God.

Rather our response should at least firstly be to ask God to teach us to trust in Him more. As God takes away things that we might be relying on too much in order to direct our attention and trust to Him and Him alone.

And that's a desperately hard lesson to learn. It's not easy to trust in God alone. I found when I went to England for the last three years I've been back for six months now.

And I found that I'd discovered that I'd been relying on all sorts of good things in my life that no longer were there. My family. My friends. A sense of belonging.

I was in a foreign country in England. They spoke the same language but I was still a foreigner. I didn't really belong. I was there temporarily. What I found taken away for me because I was doing a PhD study was the value of my job.

[15 : 45] It didn't always seem worthwhile to be spending three years writing something that hardly anybody will ever read. also had been taken away the appreciation of others for my ministry and for my being.

They were all good things but as they'd gone because I was in England doing a different sort of work I realised how I had relied on them and not necessarily on God who'd provided those things.

And so the lesson I had to learn in England was to trust in God and God alone. Now the crunch for me is having come back will I remember that lesson that I've learned because now that all those things are provided again the test is whether I rely on God and God alone and not those things which he provides.

And that's the issue for Israel because they've ended their 40 years in the wilderness. Moses is saying have you learnt the lesson that God and God alone is the provider because you're about to enter a land where everything is provided for you.

No longer will it be obvious that God is the provider of manna and so on because you will enter a land that's described in verses 7 to 10 as full of abundance. Look at the description.

[17 : 00] For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land a land with flowing streams and springs underground waters welling up in valleys and hills a land of wheat and barley vines fig trees pomegranates olive trees and honey a land where you may eat bread without scarcity where you lack nothing a land whose stones are iron and from whose hills you may mine copper you shall eat your fill this is a giant safe ways they're about to enter everything's provided for them the crunch is will you keep remembering the lesson you've learnt in the wilderness that God is the provider notice how the warning continues in verse 11 onwards take care that you do not forget the Lord your God by failing to keep his commandments his ordinances and his statutes which I'm commanding you today when you've eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them when your herds and flocks have multiplied and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied then do not exalt yourself forgetting the Lord your God that's the danger that in all the abundance and the plenty they forget the lesson that God is the one who provides as we saw last week and we see again here we are actually in more spiritual danger in times of plenty than in times of scarcity because in a great big giant safe ways everything's laid on we don't necessarily see the hand of

God providing it's very interesting that in this country there is stronger Christian faith in rural communities than in urban communities because in rural communities it's more obvious that God needs to provide the rain and the food but we can get any sort of fruit any time of year by just walking into safeways 24 hours a day even it's extraordinary decadence in a way and so easy to forget that it's God who provides the pineapple and the flour and the milk and so on in fact we walk in and something's out of stock and we complain but it's God the provider in times of abundance as well as in times of scarcity one of the great dangers and indeed virtues I think in some respects of our society but dangerous for us as a Christian is self sufficiency is the independence that we have all we need that we don't need anything else and so often that attitude carries over in the way we relate to God that I've got everything

I need and I don't really need God but when I need him I'll call on him because I'll know he's there so many people have told me that in my ministry when I visit them they know that God sort of in the background if they need him they'll call on him but the lesson is we need him every day we need to rely on him every day and rather not to rely on the things that he provides but on him the provider of those things in times of plenty we need to ask the same sort of question that Israel was being forced to ask in times of scarcity God in the midst of all this abundance and plenty how can I grow as a Christian how can I grow in my faith and trust of you how can this situation my wealth and my health and my house and my spouse how can this situation help me towards spiritual maturity that question we need to ask all the time not only in times of distress but in times of ease as well Israel's 40 years in the wilderness was their preparation for a better place they were being prepared for the promised land and they were being urged to recognize that God and God alone was the provider our whole life is like a wilderness experience because our whole life is in a sense preparation for heaven to learn and grow as Christians in our trust and faith in

God did Israel learn its lesson in the wilderness well their history in the land tells us that maybe they didn't are we any different are we learning the lesson in this life preparing us for heaven there's a sting in the tail at the end of this chapter in verse 18 to 20 because ultimately false reliance is idolatry and that is the worst sin but remember the Lord your God for it is he who gives you power to get wealth so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors as he is doing today if you do forget the Lord your God and follow other gods to serve and worship them I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish like the nations that the Lord is destroying before you so shall you perish because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God we're fools if we think that idolatry is totem poles and crystals and stars and statues idolatry can be idolatry of good things as well it seems to me that the warning here is that when our reliance and trust is placed in the things

God provides rather than in him the provider we make of those good things idols security spouse house wealth health family friends church all of those things can be idols if we rely on them rather than the God who provides them if we find that we cannot do without something it is an idol for us and we may well find that God takes it away as he did for Israel in order to direct our attention to him and to trust in him you may well ask is a loving God really like this would a loving God really take away some of these good things from me and the answer is yes precisely because of his love for it is the same God who tested and disciplined his own son Jesus

[23 : 16] Christ he sent him into the wilderness for 40 days paralleling Israel's 40 years in the wilderness like Israel he also was in a desert like Israel he also hungered and thirsted like Israel he was being tested to see whether he would be a faithful child of God and interestingly remember what he quoted back to the devil in his trial in the desert Deuteronomy 6 and 8 this very chapter in part and Jesus was showing that he unlike Israel was a true Israelite a faithful son who relied on God and God alone all the things the devil offered Jesus were his by right Jesus could have taken them and could have claimed them but he was prepared to trust in God and God alone that's the discipline of God the loving father who disciplined Israel who disciplined Jesus and disciplines us as well but remember that the discipline of Jesus was ultimately for our good

Jesus or God in the end allowed his own son to die on a cross a harsh thing from a father maybe but yes indeed the most loving thing of all for in allowing Jesus to die on the cross God is providing all our needs for eternity so that if anyone hungers we go to Jesus who invites us to come to him any who hunger and he invites those who are thirsty to come to him all who thirst and he'll give them life giving water and if any are weary he invites them to come to him and take his easy yoke and burden and if any are guilty to come to him to find forgiveness of sins for eternity and if any die to come to him to find in him resurrection and life forever and if any are lost to come to him and find in him the way to the true and eternal promised land the land where there'll be no more crying or tears or pain in the end God says come to me and come to my son and rely in me and rely in him and trust in me and trust in him for we provide you all the needs you ever need so trust in me and trust in Jesus that's what the hymn writer was writing about when he wrote these words guide me oh my great redeemer pilgrim through this barren land

I am weak but you are mighty hold me with your powerful hand bread of heaven feed me now and evermore when I tread the verge of Jordan bid my anxious fears subside death of death and hell's destruction land me safe on Canaan's side songs of praises I will ever sing to you we sing him number five hundred and 228 a a a Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.