

God's Perfect Provisions

'Rev. J. Harold Stephens tells of a particular cooking crisis: There was a young bride, a poor cook, whose husband came home to find her crying. "The dog ate the biscuits", she sobbed. "Never mind, honey", he said. "We'll get another dog".'

And before they get another dog, she'd better enroll in some cooking classes!! But there are no such worries when God is the chef! For all that God provides to us through earthly means is perfect in its original state, but because it arises from a fallen creation, it will have imperfections. But whatever He provides us through supernatural means is naturally, unquestionably perfect.

Lest there be any doubt, everything, absolutely everything, that we need to flourish on this earth comes to us from the very hand of God the Creator, our Father. He has set in place immutable laws that govern how the entire creation operates. In brief, when people live in full accordance to His commands, the very land upon which the people live will be blessed so that it provides plentifully for the people to live securely, abundantly and happily. There are myriad examples of this even in our modern day. Consider the most obvious one. Prior to the Jews beginning to return en masse to the Holy Land, that whole land was barren, a veritable wasteland. Hardly anyone could eke out a living there.

Those who did, about 350,000 mostly Arabs and Ottoman Turks, could barely coax out of the soil enough for just themselves to survive, let alone produce any surplus. The few Jews who still lived in the land were sorely oppressed by those Arabs and Ottoman Turk overlords. Missouri's own Mark Twain, upon visiting the Holy Land in 1867 pronounced it a "bitter disappointment", "desolate and unlovely", with "hardly a tree or shrub anywhere".

But once the Jews began to return to the land from nations around the world, the land began to respond to its lawful, predestined, inhabitants. It began to green. Crops began to bear more and more fruit. It's almost as if the land itself had missed its rightful people for all those millennia. Look at Israel now, even though living in just a fraction of the Promised Land, it's practically the fruit basket of not just itself, but all of Europe! Talk about fruitfulness! It was a privilege for me when visiting Israel in 2018, to eat apples picked then and there from the trees as we rode jeeps into some orchards in Israel's north, near the Golan Heights.

Consider also America. We are truly a bountiful nation. We have some of the most vast, fertile expanses in the world. We can way more than feed ourselves. We export enormous quantities of grains, meats, poultry, all over the world. We have truly been blessed. For most of our existence as a nation, the bulk of our population has humbly lived in accordance with God's laws. And therefore the land has produced. But as we have gradually turned our backs on God, as more and more sins have piled up

before God, the land has literally suffered. We eke out similar quantities as before using our imperfect ingenuity with fertilizers, herbicides, pharmaceuticals. Not only are we not following God's instructions on how to treat the land, we're so disobeying God's laws for living that productivity is falling, and the very economics of the country are growing progressively more unstable.

Also consider Ukraine, Europe's "bread basket". It just so happens to also have vast, fertile fields of grain. But because of Russia's heinous invasion, much of that produce has gone to rot, raising food prices for countries across Europe, Africa and Asia! Why so much fruitfulness in Ukraine? Well, Ukraine has historically had, for centuries, one of the largest population of Jews in the world. The same is true for Russia. America, also, has for most of our history, more Jews living here than anywhere else in the world. As the Jews are God's Chosen People, He faithfully continues to abide by His covenants with them. And where they live humbly before Him, the land produces, especially for them.

Let's turn back the hands of time and look at Exodus 16. The Israelites, just-freed from Egyptian slavery, were en route to the Promised Land. This sojourn in the wilderness was never intended to be a 40-year affair. While the people needed food and water on the way in the barren deserts of the wilderness, when their supplies began to run low, they complained, turning their anger toward Moses and Aaron. All the while, they could easily see the awesome glory of God emanating from the supernatural

cloud by day and supernatural tower of fire by night. But it seems it no longer impressed them. With stomachs growling, they sulked, imagining through rose-colored memories how “wonderful” it was back in Egypt, where they could “freely” eat meats, stews, all kinds of vegetables and fruits. Conveniently they forgot all the backbreaking misery of their slavery. Which makes their grumbling all the more inexcusable.

None of this was news to the Lord. He had object lessons already prepared for them. He sent masses of quail as meat for them to eat. For a whole month. Along with miraculous manna, the bread of heaven. Well, not exactly the Bread of Heaven, but close to it. The manna formed on the ground, in wispy round shapes, not terribly unlike our communion wafers. By itself, it tasted like olive oil on wafers made with honey. But they needed to crush it, and beat it to make a flour with which they could cook up any number of forms.

Lest that object lesson be missed, Lord Jesus specifically stated in John 6:32-33: “The truth is”, Jesus said, “Moses didn’t give you the bread of heaven. It’s My Father Who offers bread that comes as a dramatic sign from heaven. The bread of God is the One Who came out of heaven to give His life to feed the world”.’ As the manna had to be crushed and beaten into flour, so, too, did the True Bread of Heaven, our Lord Christ Jesus, had to have His body crushed and beaten on the cross so that God could then “feed the world”. Not just the people of the world, but

the world itself. For when Adam fell, so did the totality of creation as well. The entire creation itself, the earth and all the cosmos, began dying the same instant that Adam sinned. If we were created by God to have dominion over the earth, to care for it, if Christ came only to save us, restore us, the people, if the earth continued to decay and die away in inevitable entropy, where would redeemed humanity live in order to fulfill its original God-given destiny? There has to be an earth. And thus it has to be saved as well. And so the manna in the wilderness formed on the earth, the very ground on which the people walked.

As it turns out, looking ahead, the people ended up eating manna, not just for a few months, but for forty years! That they had trouble following the simple, plain instructions of God teaching them what the Sabbath was for, and how to observe it, proves yet again the strain of obstinacy that got the better of them all too often. For when they had reached the borders of the Promised Land, heeding the cowardly words of 10 fearful reconnaissance spies, they balked at entering the Holy Land God had prepared for them to enter. After everything God had done for them! Saving them from every plague sent upon Egypt, including saving all their firstborn at that first Passover. Then the stupendous parting of the Red Sea which saved them from Pharaoh's pursuing army. And the manna itself, the multiple provisionings of water, the inexplicable preservation of their clothing and footwear with nothing wearing out during the initial few months of their trek to the Land.

Seemingly they forgot everything the Lord had done for them, seemingly they even forgot Who He is, especially damning when recalling their construction of the golden calf to worship while Moses was still on Mt. Sinai receiving God's Law. After all that, all their brains seemed to be living in their stomachs!

So it shouldn't be unexpected that the people in John 6, after having been miraculously fully fed with delicious freshly-baked bread and grilled fish, produced as the Lord handed out, and handed out, and kept handing out, more and more loaves and fish, that, well, frankly, the people were "spoiled". Imagine, if they just could keep this Jesus around, they'd never have to work again! Never plant, never fish, never harvest. Just open their mouths and be fed. Spoiled rotten they'd become; in only one feeding! Totally missed the point. How wonderful would life be if we didn't have to do anything to eat, drink and be merry? Oh, just about what the über rich of the world do today. They get together to plan regulations for how the rest of us must live, so they can keep living high on the hog forever, with us paying for it. No God needed. None of His rules for life. Left to themselves, they can eventually completely replace Him, freed from Him forever. How wonderful! Not!! Father God, in His unfathomable mercy, will not give ourselves that much rope that we truly hang ourselves to death. His highest and best, indeed, the perfect provision for all people and all things, He has already provided—His very life in His very Self in Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to Him, and follow Him!

