

INTRODUCTION

Summer is a time for road trip. Both my wife and I enjoy driving. I am a map guy. So before I go to a new place I will study the map to understand exactly which roads to take and where to make turns to get there. My wife, however, has a stronger sense of direction than me and she can smell whether we should bear left or right at an intersection. Nowadays we have the convenience of GPS. But GPS can be far from fool-proof. In May of this year, a woman was driving somewhere in Canada following the directions from her GPS in a foggy night when her car plunged into a lake. Fortunately, she was not hurt. Needless to say, her car was totaled. She had to swim 100 feet in a 40 F water to get to the shore. What happened was that she went the wrong way and mistook a boat ramp for a road. When we venture into a new place we need clear directions.

The book of Deuteronomy defines a new chapter in the history of Israel. The people left Egypt. God disciplined the previous generation for its rebellion and lack of faith to God that He would guide them into Canaan. That generation gradually passed away in the wilderness. Despite the people's disbelief God's promise would not fade away. A new generation of Israelites was now standing on the eastern bank of the river Jordan. Joshua was about to succeed Moses to become their new leader. Moses gave his farewell speech before God took him home. He told his people that in order for them to conquer the Promised Land they had to learn from the failure of the previous generation. They also had to love God and obeyed all His commands. Time has changed and our cultural background is very different from the Israelites a few thousand years ago. However, God's truth stands forever. His expectation for His children also remains unchanged. God is the ultimate source of grace. We have to obey Him in order to be blessed.

EXPLANATION

We have read from verses 1 to 12 of Deuteronomy chapter 11 earlier. It gives us a summary of what the Israelites went through from the time they left Egypt to the days of their wilderness wandering. Moses reassured the Israelites that the land God had promised their forefathers was a land flowing with milk and honey. It is a picture of abundance. God would continue to bless them if they would follow Him wholeheartedly. What kind of blessings God would give to those who obey Him? Let us consider three major aspects as we study verses 13-32.

1. 神供應我們的需要 God Provides for Our Needs

First of all, God would provide for our needs. Let us read together from verses 13 to 17. In order for God to provide the Israelites their needs they had to obey Him. Moses says in verse 13 they had to love the Lord and serve Him with all their heart and soul. It means to love God with all of one's being. This notion of loving God with all the heart and soul is repeated 8 times in the book of Moses and they all appear in Deuteronomy. That saying summarizes the essence of God's Law. That is why when a teacher of the Law challenged Jesus about which law was the most important Jesus quoted the same saying in [Matthew 22:37](#) - Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your

God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” Moses said if a person loves God he would naturally obey His commands. This word “obey” has its original meaning of “to listen.” When we say that children have to listen to their parents it means that they do not just pay attention to what their parents say but they also have to do accordingly. How would God provide for the Israelites if they listened to Him? God did so in a simple way. Let us read again from **verses 14-15**: 14 Then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. 15 I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied. God promised to provide food for the humans and grass for the herd through giving them rain. The phrase “autumn and spring rains” encloses the beginning and end of the rainy season. God would provide rain at the right time. Therefore, God’s corresponding judgment if the Israelites disobeyed Him was simply to withhold rain, as written in **verse 17**: Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the Lord is giving you. Let me remind you that we are dealing with the Middle East where water is scarce. It would be a disaster if there is no rain. Without water there would be no food, then famine and plague would be the consequences. The ultimate result is that people would perish. God wanted the Israelites to bear in mind that He was the one who provided for such essential natural resource like rain. That is why Moses warns them in **verse 16**: Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them. He said: “Don’t be fool into believing that other false gods can give you the same blessings.” The Israelites were about to enter into Canaan where the local people worshipped other gods. Those people would tell the Israelites that it was their gods that provided for all their needs. That is a detrimental custom they should not follow.

Compare to the Israelites we live in a comfortable western world. We turn the faucet on and water flows out. We switch on a button and there is electricity. We are spoiled by all these conveniences and we take things for granted. Recently, there is a TV commercial of a phone company where some family members mourn over an interruption to the internet service. All of a sudden they do not know how to spend their time. What we see in commercials are reflection of real life. It happened the same way when the internet service at my home was down. My two sons groaned as if it were the end of the world. Simple things like that remind us that God is our provider. Moses’ warning is for us too: do not worship other gods. While most of us may not worship a carved idol we may worship other things. Whenever someone or something replaces the position of Jehovah God in our hearts that can become our idol. Some people worship money, thinking than money can buy everything. So they spend all their energy trying to make more money. Some other people worship their job. Therefore, they keep fighting for the opportunity to climb up the career ladder. Whereas, some other people may worship their health. They eat this and try that to make sure that they would stay young forever. Don’t be misled into worshipping other gods. Jehovah is the only provider for all of our needs. Worship Him alone.

2. 神延長我們的年日 God Prolongs Our Days

Since God is the ultimate source of grace we have to obey Him in order to be blessed. God blesses us by providing for our needs. He also blesses us by prolonging our days. Let us read together the next section in verses 18-21. God does not only have sovereignty over the nature, He also have authority over our lives. Moses tells the Israelites that if they obeyed God, He would

prolong their days. Look again at **verse 21**: ...your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the Lord swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. In any culture longevity is seen as a blessing. After all, no matter what wealth and possession you have it does not do any good if you do not have a long life to enjoy them. If the Lord does not continue to give us breathe of life we cannot accomplish anything. There is a wise saying in **James 4:13-15** – 13 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." 14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. 15 Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." Our planning would achieve nothing if God does not prolong our days and give us the opportunity to pursue it.

Just like God's blessings of providing for our needs, the blessing of long life requires obedience of God's commands. But Moses emphasizes that God also desires to bless our next generation. Therefore, Moses tells the Israelites in **verses 18-20**: 18 Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 19 Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 20 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. The wordings here are almost identical to what Moses said earlier in chapter 6. People have to make God's Word a constant reminder in their daily lives. Some Jews follow the instructions here literally and make frontlets and tie them to their forehead. It is a small box that contains a tiny parchment written with some Bible verses. Similarly, in archaeological findings small containers with writings of the Scripture were discovered near doorposts. Also, Moses commanded the Israelites to teach their children about God's law in every circumstance. The seminary where our current pastors and elder of this church attend belongs to the Presbyterian Church of America. The denomination has a book called Westminster catechism which basically is a question and answer format for the fathers to train their children the Christian faith. The kids are expected to memorize the answers. For example, when a dad asks: "Are there more Gods than one?" His child will recite: "There is but one only, the living and true God." Whether it is for the adults and children the general principle is to use various means to help them keep God's Word in their hearts and minds. Many parents of older children can testify that the golden opportunity to teach their kids is when they are still young. When they still pay respect to you and listen to you, you have to find ways to shape their mind with God's truth. What happens in school, in the family or in the news can all be used as springboard to convey spiritual lessons. One popular topic these days is the war on bathrooms. What if your child asks you why a boy is allowed to use a girl's bathroom? Besides using common sense or quoting the so-called experts' advice you have to give an answer based on God's eternal truth. It goes without saying that parents have to love and know God's Word first. If you do not know what is said in the Bible then how can you teach your kids about it? Therefore, everything comes down to our personal relationship with God. God does not only intend to prolong our lives, He also wants to extend His blessings to our next generation.

3. 神保護我們的家園 God Protects Our Land

Since God is the ultimate source of grace we have to obey Him in order to be blessed. God blesses us by providing for our needs, and by prolonging our days so that we can enjoy His

blessings. Thirdly, God blesses us through protecting our land to ensure our safety. Let us read the next section from verse 22-25. Moses reiterates God's promise to give the Israelites the land of Canaan. God would not only chase their enemies out from the land but He would also continue to protect their land from the threat of their foes. Moses says in **verse 25**: No man will be able to stand against you. The Lord your God, as he promised you, will put the terror and fear of you on the whole land, wherever you go. The enemies were afraid of the Israelites not because of how strong they were but it was because God protected them. Here Moses repeated what he said earlier in **2:25** - This very day I will begin to put the terror and fear of you on all the nations under heaven. They will hear reports of you and will tremble and be in anguish because of you. God said that soon after the Israelites defeated the two kings on the east coast of the river Jordan. Later, after the Israelites crossed the Jordan and prepared to conquer Jericho they sent two spies to the home of Rahab. Listen to the report from Rahab in **Joshua 2:9** – “I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you.” God reassured His promise through the mouth of an inhabitant in the city the Israelites were about to destroy. Again, this blessing that God would protect their land was based on a condition that the Israelites would obey His commands. Moses says in **verses 22-23**: 22 If you carefully observe all these commands I am giving you to follow - to love the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways and to hold fast to him - 23 then the Lord will drive out all these nations before you, and you will dispossess nations larger and stronger than you. Moses made it clear that it was God who drove out their enemies because there was no way they could overcome enemies who were larger and stronger than them.

God promised to protect our land if we obey Him, just like He protected the Israelites in Canaan. But it does not mean we will be immune to danger and difficulty in life. Many of us are aware that last Sunday a guy opened fire in a gay nightclub in Orlando and killed 50 people. The shooter also died in the ordeal. It was the deadliest shooting in the U.S. history. Regardless of the motive or who lost their lives in the incident we should condemn such violent act. Sadly enough, two nights before that on June 10 another bloodshed happened in the same city. A sister posted an article on WeChat about the incident. Artist Christiana Grimmie was shot to death by a man when she was signing autographs soon after she concluded a performance that evening. The shooter did so out of hatred because Christiana was out-spoken about her faith. Her singing coach who had helped her in a TV singing contest later said: “I am left stunned and confused how these things can conceivably continue to happen in our world.” From the Bible there can only be one answer for such tragedy – sin. Christiana clearly understood that calamity like that can happen to anyone. She once shared on Tweeter (my paraphrase): “Sometimes God allows the worst things to happen in your life. You don't know why. But that doesn't mean that you have to stop believing in Him.” There are many things we do not know. But the Bible clearly tells us that our lives are in God's hands. It is God who protects our land. But again it does not mean that we will not face danger or difficulty in life. The Bible tells us to pray for this nation and its leaders, so that we can live in peace. But ultimately, what protects you is not your life insurance, security system in your home, your retirement savings or even the law enforcement agencies.

4. 抉擇：你會如何選擇? Decision: What Would You Choose?

God promised the Israelites to provide for their needs, prolong their days and protect their land. For each blessing God demanded the same requirement of obedience to Him and walking in His

ways. After Moses finished saying all that he gave the Israelites a choice. Let us read from verses 26-32. The offer is clear: if the Israelites obeyed God they would be blessed, otherwise they would be cursed. Toward the end of Deuteronomy, when Moses understood that he was coming close to an end of his earthly life he repeated the same saying in **30:15-16** – 15 See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. 16 For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. Brothers and sisters, we too have a choice. Two distinct decisions lead to contrasting results. What would you choose?

CONCLUSION

The history of Israel bears much resemblance to the Christian life. God rescued the Israelites from the status of slavery in Egypt and gave them freedom in the Promised Land. They had to make a choice whether to worship Jehovah or to worship the local gods. God releases us from the bondage of sin and gives us freedom in Christ. When we decided to accept Christ as our Savior and Lord we had already made a decision to follow Him. However, we have to repeat the same decision in every aspect of our life. In our study, career, relationship, leisure, marriage, parenting, retirement and any other area of life we have to obey God, so that we can be blessed. I shared at the beginning about the woman driving her car into the lake. She made a wrong decision because the weather condition obscured her and the information on her GPS misled her. In comparison, long before the invention of compass for thousands of years, navigators and explorers have learned how to find their direction by looking at the stars in the sky. I know close to nothing about astronomy. But I do know that on the northern hemisphere the North Star can help us locate the true north. Perhaps you can try this tonight. First you have to find the Big Dipper, which consists of seven stars. If you draw a line to connect the two outer stars of the Big Dipper and extend it about 5 times the distance then you will find the North Star. This straight line is pointing to the true north. At the recent church retreat a brother showed me a very cool smart phone app that can tell you where each constellation is in the sky. All you have to do is to hold your phone up. But there is someone far superior to GPS and the North Star. It is our Creator God who gives man skills to manufacture GPS and who puts the North Star in the universe. If we follow His ways we will be going in the right direction. God is our everlasting guidance in this ever-changing world.