

God's Sovereign Blessing Despite Our Undeserving

Numbers 11:18–25

One point of biblical theology that keeps the Christian going in a crazy, chaotic world is God's absolute sovereignty. *Man* is not the absolute determiner of all things; *God* is! The God of heaven is wise and good. Behind the scenes at every moment he is quietly working out his perfect plan, which no force of evil can derail. The Christian can know with absolute certainty that "*all* things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." At the final day it will all be plain. The eternal God will be glorified in the kingdom of his Son. Truth will be vindicated. Our Father's wisdom and power will be on display, and all the saints will marvel. Amen!

Something like that no doubt kept those whose hope was in God going at the time of the events in our present chapter. Was the sovereign God—who displayed his mighty power in the overthrow of Pharaoh and his powerful armies who died when the raging waters of the Red Sea, returning to their assigned place, rushed in to overwhelm them—still on his throne? Was he still on his throne when his people began to complain about the taste of the manna and wanted to go back to Egypt? When fire roared through the edges of the camp and destroyed many ungrateful people? Indeed he was, though it might not have seemed so at the time. God was on his throne then, and he is still on his throne today.

I have three points this morning: (1) *Despising* the LORD; (2) *Doubting* the LORD; and (3) *Declaring* the LORD. First,

1. Despising the LORD (18–20)

Israel as a covenant people was greatly blessed by God. God had promised, "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:5–6). What the prophet Amos would later declare was true all along: "*You only* have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2).

Israel was singularly blessed! God brought them out into the wilderness to reveal himself to them, but they would still have to travel through the vast desert. They had completed their first three-day journey, and it was dawning on them that it was not always going to be a cakewalk.

"Who will give us meat to eat? There is nothing at all except this manna." The manna was the daily supply of food, freely given by God, that had sustained them now for a whole year. It was a miracle food that gave them balanced nutrition, but they despised it. More than that, they despised the LORD who promised to sustain them! Moses puts his finger on the problem in verse 20 of our text: "You have *despised* the LORD who is among you." Their despising of the LORD was a rejection of his person. As the Psalmist would later say, "Truly God is good to

Israel”—but they did not want to consider it. Their twisted minds preferred enslavement in Egypt. They wanted to go back to Egypt and be under the taskmaster’s whip.

Satan is an enslaver. Like the drug dealer who gives out free samples, hoping to hook people and gain repeat customers, Satan’s wiles can be alluring. He promises freedom, but his goal is enslavement. He sets a trap for the unwary. His goal is to get you hooked, but he doesn’t show you that up front. He doesn’t say: “Beware! My goal is to entrap you.” Things that might appear benign—harmless entertainment—end up enslaving you in the end. Such is the allure of pornography, of easy Internet shopping, of online gambling, of social media and gaming that can distract you from the things that are most important and keep you from meaningful interactions with real people and make you neglect your relationship with God, the source of all good.

Imagine! Here are the covenant people despising the LORD! Despising the LORD who had rescued them from Egyptian bondage, who had revealed himself to them at Sinai, who had promised them an inheritance in the land of Canaan—a figure of their eternal home in heaven. The person who trusts in God finds that God’s promise is true: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

Satan may promise substitutes, but God’s promise is the real thing. Seek his face, and he will give you life forevermore. “Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”¹

But Israel in the wilderness didn’t appreciate the blessings of God. They grew tired of manna. They wanted variety. A diet of plant-based food was boring. They wanted meat. They wanted the flesh (בָּשָׂר) of fowl and fish and domesticated animals. Satan, who blinds the minds of unbelievers, had convinced them that God was not enough. They must have something more to be truly happy.

What about you? Do you desire the knowledge of God above everything else? Do you recognize him as your chief treasure? Or are the things of this world more alluring? The way you can discern this is: What do you seek? What occupies your time? The vanities of this world? Or the face of God?

Humans are eaters, and food is actually a great blessing. I’m going to develop this idea in my afternoon sermon today as well. When God created Adam and put him into a beautiful garden, he told him, “Of every tree in the garden thou mayest freely eat.” The whole *world*—except for one tree—was his to eat. Mealtime was a

¹ Ps. 73:25–26

time of rest and fellowship with his beautiful wife, Eve. When Jesus came, he taught us that he is the bread of life. He fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fishes. The people all did eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. No one went away hungry. Jesus could truly say, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.” And so it is today. As people, we have constant need of food, but what truly satisfies is Christ. But that’s not all. The Bible teaches that history as we know it will end with the *marriage supper of the Lamb*. The whole redeemed race will eat and drink and fellowship and rejoice together in the presence of Almighty God. Man in heaven will be an eater, but what he will eat will be the satisfying food of God himself. It will be the fulfillment of what Christ promised in John 6: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.”

Believer, is it your desire to feed on Christ? This is what we do week after week as we gather to worship Christ and receive the Lord’s supper. That regular rhythm of eating and drinking makes us long for the marriage supper of the Lamb and makes us know that in the end, only *Christ* can truly satisfy.

Dear believer, do not *despise* the Lord. Do not fall for the lie that what Christ offers is meager, but what the world offers is so much better. In him is life itself—the abundant life that only he can give.

The Israelites despised the LORD, and despite this, he gave them quail. But the blessing turned into a curse in their mouths. They ate to the full, day after day, until it came out of their nostrils and became loathsome to them, because they did not appreciate the only One who could truly satisfy.

Many of the people of Israel despised the LORD, but it affected Moses too, for he was

2. Doubting the LORD (21–22)

Moses said, “The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.’ Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?”

Here was the great Moses, whom God had raised up to lead his people, the man who was slow of speech and slow of tongue. But God had poured out his Spirit on

Moses, and he who was not eloquent by nature had become a great prophet of God. Here was a man who had spent *time* with God, who had learned the ways of God. God himself would later testify of him, “Not so with My servant Moses; he is faithful in all My house. I speak with him face to face, even plainly, and not in dark sayings; and he sees the form of the LORD.”² Here is the one whom the writer to the Hebrews would commend with the words, “He endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27).

Moses was a man of faith, yet listen to him now. Here were the children of Israel clamoring for meat. They were saying, “Give us meat to eat,” and Moses knew he didn’t have any meat to give them. He protests to the LORD: “The people whom I am among are six hundred thousand men on foot; yet You have said, ‘I will give them meat, that they may eat for a whole month.’ Shall flocks and herds be slaughtered for them, to provide enough for them? Or shall all the fish of the sea be gathered together for them, to provide enough for them?”

Where was Moses going to get meat sufficient for 2½ million people? Do the math: 2½ million people times 30 days per month. By any measure, that’s a lot of meat!

So here is Moses, the man of faith, the man who endured as seeing Him who is invisible, *doubting* the promise of God. Just minutes earlier he had promised the people: “Therefore the *LORD* will give you meat, and you shall eat. You shall eat, not one day, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days, but for a whole month.” Moses had spoken the truth, but now he fell into unbelief. Where was God going to get all that meat?

Moses had forgotten that the God of heaven is the God of the *impossible*. He had spoken the universe into existence. He had flung the sun, moon and stars into space. He had established their orbits. He had formed the natural order such that it would sustain life.

God would later declare, “Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine” (Ps. 50).

Christian, remember: God doesn’t lack for resources. He had posed the question to Abraham: “Is anything too hard for the LORD?” He had promised Abraham that his wife Sarah, who had been unable to bear children, would have a son. Would God be able to fulfill his promise? Of course! There is a lesson for us here: Whenever God speaks, we should receive, without protest, whatever he has promised with his mouth. Does the thing he promises seem impossible? Remember, he is Almighty God. Whatever God has promised, he *will*, by his mighty power, certainly perform.

² Num. 12:7–8

Moses had passed along to the people that God was going to give them meat, but then the reality of that promise had set in, and Moses flinched. Could God really do that?

Yes, he can! Remember the words of our Lord, “Have faith in God. For assuredly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, ‘Be removed and be cast into the sea,’ and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that those things he says will be done, he will have whatever he says” (Mark 11:23).

Whatever God promises, he is able to perform. There is nothing too hard for the Lord. “My God shall supply *all* your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”³ You can bank on it!

Moses may have had good intentions. He perhaps feared that God’s holy name would be slandered if he should fail to deliver the promised food. But our God is not about to fail. He always delivers on his promises. So he rebukes Moses: “Has the LORD’s arm been shortened? Now you shall see whether what I say will happen to you or not.” None of us should doubt!

Despising the LORD, doubting the LORD . . . that brings me to point 3,

3. Declaring the LORD (23–25)

God had said, “Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel” (v. 16). Now, after receiving the LORD’s rebuke, we read that “Moses went out and told the people the words of the LORD, and he gathered the seventy men of the elders of the people and placed them around the tabernacle.”

Moses obeys. He gathers seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom he knew to have good reputations and who were recognized leaders. He brought them to the tabernacle, into the presence of the LORD, to be ordained. This was the beginning of the Sanhedrin, the high court of the Jews. Here was a divinely-ordained court of godly men who could hear matters and apply the wisdom of the Word to specific cases. This is an aspect of rule by a plurality of elders, something that is seen, over and over again, throughout both Testaments. This is akin to what are called presbyteries, classes, synods and general assemblies.

The divinely-revealed number seventy is significant. This was the the number of the fathers of Israel who had gone down into Egypt with Jacob. Exodus 1 records that “All the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were *seventy* souls: for Joseph was in Egypt already.”

Calvin remarks that “this seems to have been with them, as it were, a sacred number; as recalling to their memory that little band from which they had derived their origin. [Again], before the Law was promulgated, Moses was commanded to take with him *seventy* to accompany him to the mount, and to be eye-witnesses of God’s glory.” The number 70 would remind Israel of its humble roots.

³ Phil. 4:19

But when the seventy elders of Israel were gathered before the LORD, we read that “then the LORD came down in the cloud, and spoke to him, and took of the Spirit that was upon him, and placed the same upon the seventy elders; and it happened, when the Spirit rested upon them, that they prophesied, although they never did so again.”

Note that the elders are said to have “prophesied.” One of the lexicons observes that this word in its oldest forms, referred to “religious ecstasy with or without song and music; later, essentially religious instruction, with occasional predictions.”⁴ Here were godly men who knew the Lord, but now were empowered to give, with no preparation, learned discourses on “the word and works of God in a singular and marvelous manner, as the prophets did.”⁵ Calvin observes that “this was a visible sign of the gift of the Spirit.” God was with them and empowered them to speak, to the edification and spiritual profit of the people. In the wisdom of God they did this only once, to indicate that the Spirit was with them. This is in contrast to Moses, who prophesied over and over. In giving them this gift, God was impressing upon his church the necessity of choosing and ordaining only Spirit-filled men of good character and a competent knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

An Episcopal priest in New York City declared that Jesus is “transgender” and told the congregation that if they deny this, they are denying the “divinity” of Christ. She declared that “God is non-binary, but I’m going to go further than that, and I’m going to say God is actually also trans!” A news article reported that a minister in a liberal Presbyterian church stated during an Easter message that Jesus *may have not risen from the dead*; and a *lesbian* chaplain at the same church doubted Jesus’s entire existence and said if he *did* exist, he certainly did not die for the sins of humanity.⁶

Any church that permits such denials of the truth of God’s Word is not a true church, but a synagogue of Satan.⁷ God’s people must not be influenced by such blasphemy just because it seems to have a veneer of respectability.

Brothers and sisters, let us not *despise* the Lord or *doubt* the Lord; rather, let us *declare* the Lord with lives of holiness and thanksgiving. People all around us need Christ, and they need to hear the testimony of our lips. People all around us are going to hell without Christ.

God sovereignly blessed his people despite their undeserving. Is this not also true of us? When we were self-centered, haters of God, his spirit brought us to himself. We were *never* deserving. We were never better than any others. God’s

⁴ Brown, Driver, Briggs lexicon, נָבִיא (Logos Bible Software)

⁵ Matthew Poole commentary

⁶ <https://www.breitbart.com/faith/2026/09/25/nyc-episcopal-priest-declares-jesus-is-transgender-if-you-deny-this-you-deny-his-divinity/amp/> accessed 9-25-26

⁷ Rev. 2:9

sovereignly blessed despite our undeserving. Is this not the gospel? Thank God that he saves undeserving sinners! Amen!