

CHAPTER TWO

THE PROVISION: HE PROVIDES MY NEEDS

Because the Lord is my shepherd...I shall not want.

This is not an isolated promise. There are many other scriptures that assure the Shepherd's commitment to provide for His sheep. Here are some examples:

-The Word declares that you will have all good things:

*For the Lord God is a sun and shield; The Lord will give grace and glory; No good thing will He withhold From those who walk uprightly.
(Psalm 84:11, NKJV)*

-The Word declares that you will have no want:

Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. (Psalm 34:9, NKJV)

-The Word declares that if you ask anything in Christ's name, He will do it:

If you ask anything in My name, I will do it. (John 4:14, NKJV)

-The Word gives you a blank check: All your needs supplied according to Christ's riches in glory. You have an unlimited account:

*And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19, NKJV)*

...and there are many more similar promises. Someone calculated 8,000 promises in the Bible. Whatever you need, Jesus has said "Yes and Amen...so be it." He has given you the guarantee of His promises by His Spirit:

For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us. Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

(2 Corinthians 1:20-22, NKJV)

Jesus establishes you, anoints you, seals you, and gives you His Holy Spirit as a guarantee--not only of your salvation, but of all of His promises.

DIVINE PROVISION

First let's dispel some erroneous teaching about the phrase "I shall not want". Some people distort this promise to mean things that were never intended and, as a result, the sheep become disillusioned by expecting the Shepherd to do things that He never promised to do.

For example, "I shall not want" does not necessarily mean material prosperity. Some people in the Bible like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were wealthy. Others--like many of the prophets--were poor. Even Jesus had no place to lay His head. Some nations are rich, some are poor. Material prosperity of an individual or nation is a blessing when God bestows it, but it is not a sign of spirituality or lack thereof.

The Apostle Paul warned:

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

(1 Timothy 6:9-10, NIV)

All the things that you want that seem so important are usually temporal. Most of the things you crave are wants-- sometimes even covetousness--and not legitimate needs. If you are consumed by materialism, it is time to change your focus to spiritual things. The Bible warns:

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.

(1 John 2:15-1, NKJV)

Jesus promised that whatever you ask in His name you will receive. To ask in His name, however, means it must be in harmony with His will. One of the reasons for unanswered prayer is that we ask for the wrong reasons:

You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.
(James 4:3, NKJV)

The phrase "I shall not want" means that the Shepherd will provide the necessities of life like food, shelter, clothing, and sufficient funds for your needs. There will be divine provision--whether it is supernatural manna from the heavens, multiplied loaves and fish, or a stone in a streambed that is designed to take down a giant. He will provide what is needed, not every whim of a materialistic mindset.

Jesus said:

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:28-33, NKJV)

God will supernaturally provide your needs by multiplying what you have. He did it...

...By ravens during a famine (1 Kings 17). ...By the multiplication of oil and flour (1 Kings 17:16).

...By providing money for taxes in the mouth of a fish (Matthew 17:27).

Some people erroneously teach that "I shall not want" means you will never be sick. While healing is part of the atonement of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 53:5), believers are not promised immunity from sickness and death. Even the great prophet Elisha, who was used by God in tremendous miracles, became sick and died (1 Kings 13:14).

The statement "I am the Lord that heals" is as true today as it ever was, but it does not mean He heals on demand, that He heals every person all the time, or that a believer will be immune from death. He is your healer, and it is your spiritual right to pray and believe for healing. For some, that healing will come in this life. For others, it will occur as they step into eternity. And for some--like quadriplegic Joni Eareckson Tada and for Nick Vujicic, who was born without limbs--their physical disabilities are serving tremendous spiritual purposes.

"I shall not want" also does not mean that you will never experience trouble. Sometimes tragic circumstances of life bring sorrow, loss, and conflict. We live in a fallen world inhabited by sinful men. The reality is that bad stuff happens--terrorism, murder, great loss, and death.

No one is immune from the difficulties of life. The Prophet Elijah experienced fear and depression after his great victory over the prophets of Baal. When the evil queen threatened his life, Elijah fled into the wilderness:

...And he prayed that he might die, and said, "It is enough! Now, Lord, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers!" Then as he lay and slept under a broom tree, suddenly an angel touched him, and said to him, "Arise and eat." Then he looked, and there by his head was a cake baked on coals, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank, and lay down

again. And the angel of the Lord came back the second time, and touched him, and said, "Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for you." So he arose, and ate and drank; and he went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights as far as Horeb, the mountain of God. (1 Kings 19:3-8, NKJV)

God supplied the strength Elijah needed for his difficult journey. He provided him with food and water. Then when Elijah retreated to the mountain, the Lord spoke to him and gave him a new commission. God met his need physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The Apostle Paul openly shared regarding the difficulties he faced in ministry:

For we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, of our trouble which came to us in Asia: that we were burdened beyond measure, above strength, so that we despaired even of life. Yes, we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead, who delivered us from so great a death, and does deliver us; in whom we trust that He will still deliver us.

(2 Corinthians 1:8-10, NKJV)

Paul wanted believers to know that in the most difficult circumstances of life, God delivers His children. The Good Shepherd is always there with supernatural provision for you and you will emerge from this troublesome time with a greater trust in His divine provision.

David--who wrote Psalm 23--also experienced many conflicts. He faced big giants and great battles. Saul pursued him for thirteen years trying to take his life.

David was deeply discouraged at times, but His Good Shepherd never failed to provide for him. A single stone from the brook. A cave in which to rest. Bread from an altar. Warriors and friends who put their lives on the line for him.

Elijah, David, and Paul--great men of God--all experienced difficult times. There will be hard times that will challenge your faith as well. God never promised that your life would always be easy, but He did promise that He would be with you when you face difficult times and that you will not want:

*He gives power to the weak,
And to those who have no might He increases strength.
Even the youths shall faint and be weary, And the young men shall utterly fall,
But those who wait on the Lord
Shall renew their strength;
They shall mount up with wings like eagles, They shall run and not be weary,
They shall walk and not faint.
(Isaiah 40: 29-31, NKJV)*

If you need strength to fly today, you have it! If you need to run, you will not be weary. If you need strength just to walk through a difficult day, you will receive it. Divine provision from the Good Shepherd. You shall not want!

THE CHALLENGE OF CONTENTMENT

Sheep often wander away and become lost because they seek what appears to be greener grass. They graze farther and farther away from the shepherd because of what they perceive to be better pastures. Suddenly they look around, and they discover they have strayed from the flock.

Dissatisfaction is a feeling of discontent and displeasure with circumstances or personal relationships. It is unhappiness, a feeling of lack, and a belief that your needs are not being adequately met. Discontent will drive you away from the pastures of the Good Shepherd and His flock.

The Bible reveals that the enemy comes to kill, steal and destroy:

*The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.
(John 10:10, NKJV)*

If you are dissatisfied, guess who stole your contentment?

The Good Shepherd came to destroy the work of the enemy and to give you all that is needed for abundant life. He wants you to be content and happy in His care. He wants you to settle down in His pasture and enjoy His provisions instead of constantly seeking something that you perceive to be “better”. When you are dissatisfied, grumbling, and complaining, you are actually blaming God for your circumstances and implying that He is not adequately providing for you.

The Israelites are a classic example of the dangers of discontent. They were constantly complaining about God’s provision. In the wilderness, God provided clothes and shoes that did not wear out. He provided water from a rock. Still they complained. They complained because the manna God provided was not as good as the leeks and garlic they had in Egypt. Really? Leeks and garlic are better than freedom?

God called their complaining sin and judged it as such. Dissatisfaction leads to grumbling, complaining, unhappiness, and an unthankful and critical spirit. In short, dissatisfaction is sin and--as with other sins--you must confess it as such and ask God for forgiveness.

Contentment is learned by experience. The Apostle Paul declared:

...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every

situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11-13, NIV)

That is quite a statement considering Paul's experiences:

From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness--besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. (2 Corinthians 11:24-28, NKJV)

Contentment isn't governed by external circumstances, but you learn it by the circumstances you experience. A change in your circumstance may bring temporary contentment, but true satisfaction is based on your relationship with the Good Shepherd. Contentment is an inward attitude which is a process and a product of spiritual growth. Oddly, the very circumstances that can cause anxiety, frustration, and unhappiness are often God's methods for developing contentment in your life.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul gave these guidelines to Timothy which are intended for us as well:

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (1 Timothy 6:6-12, NKJV)

SPIRITUAL PROVISION

After making the statement "I shall not want", David describes the provisions of the Shepherd in the verses that follow.

-I shall not want for nourishment--physical or spiritual--because "He makes me to lie down in green pastures." (Verse 1)

-I shall not want for refreshment because "He leads me beside the still waters." (Verse 2)

-I shall not want for spiritual restoration because "He restores my soul." (Verse 3)

-I shall not want for righteousness, for He leads me in the right way. (Verse 3)

-I shall not fear the valley of death. I am not alone. He is my Comforter. (Verse 4)

-I shall not want for protection and correction in the valleys of life. (Verse 4)

-I shall not be afraid of my enemies. (Verse 5) -I will be anointed by God. (Verse 5)

-I will have blessings that literally overflow, follow me, and overtake me. (Verse 5)

-I will experience goodness and mercy as my legacy. (Verse 6)

-I am assured of my eternal destiny. (Verse 6)

Review this list again. Did you notice that it includes total provision for all you need in life and ministry?

There are seven times in Scripture where the name "Jehovah" is linked with another word. Each time it is used it confirms why "I shall not want." Study each reference where the name is used and note how that name is linked to Psalm 23:

-Psalm 23:1- Jehovah Rohi The Lord is my shepherd.

-Genesis 22:13,14 - Jehovah Jireh The Lord will provide.

-Judges 6:24- Jehovah Shalom The Lord our peace.

-Exodus 15:26- Jehovah Rapha The Lord that heals.

-Jeremiah 23:6- Jehovah Tsidkenu The Lord our righteousness.

-Ezekiel 48:35- Jehovah Shammah The Lord ever present.

-Exodus 17:8-15- Jehovah Nissi The Lord our banner.

Having the assurance that every need will be met by your benevolent Shepherd, it is time to move on with His flock to the green pastures. They won't be hard to find. He has already prepared them and He will show you the way.