© 2026 The Krapf Project

Borne by the Father

"In the wilderness thou hast seen how the Lord thy God bare thee, as a man doth bear his son, in all the way that ye went." — Deuteronomy 1:31

Summary:

God's care for his people is portrayed as a father carrying his young child through the wilderness. Human tenderness helps explain the image, but every human weakness must be set aside when it is applied to God. Earthly parents may be absent, ignorant, unable, or changeable; God is always present, perfectly wise, almighty, and unchanging in love. Remembering how he has carried us should awaken wonder and gratitude, strengthen our confidence for the remaining journey, and shape how we treat others. Those who know the Father's mercy should show kindness to the needy, commend his care to the young, and direct the bereaved to the One who can more than repair their losses.

Outline:

1. **God's care is fatherly**
   - The Lord carries, comforts, and provides for his children.
2. **His people are weak and dependent**
   - Like a young child unable to travel alone, they need to be borne throughout the way.
3. **Divine care has no human defect**
   - God is never absent, weary, ignorant, powerless, changeable, negligent, or cruel.
4. **Past mercy encourages the future**
   - The God who carried his people will remain with them until they reach their rest.
5. **The Father's mercy becomes our example**
   - Believers should help the needy, guide the young, comfort the bereaved, and commend God to others.

Text

The image is parental. Elsewhere in this book, the reference is to a parent bird: "As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him." Here, the allusion is to a human parent, a frequent image in Scripture: "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him"; "I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him"; and "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father, who is in heaven, give good gifts to them that ask him!" Maternal tenderness also offers feeling and thought: "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you"; and "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she may forget; yet will not I forget thee."

Consider the image Moses uses: a young child, too weak to walk alone, must be carried. The father is mentioned, not the mother, because carrying requires strength more than tenderness; perhaps she has died. When one parent must fill both roles, greater care and kindness are needed. Imagine an Israelite who lost his wife in the wilderness, perhaps after she bore him a son—or because of it. The bereaved child is especially dear to him, so he carries him—sometimes in his arms, often against his chest. He holds him tenderly, kisses and soothes him, lulls him to sleep, feeds and protects him, and meets all his needs.

God does all this in reality, and infinitely more. The goodness, gentleness, and care of the tenderest person cannot compare with His kindness toward His people. Any image of God must be stripped of its imperfections: a father may be unable to protect his child, be absent or inattentive, misunderstand its needs, lose affection, neglect it, or even abandon it. None of this applies to Him who carries us throughout our way.

Yea, when applying the image to God, we must remove its imperfections and add divinity. Human relationships, however complete, remain finite in scope and excellence, but God's attributes are infinite. His love surpasses knowledge. "He is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think."

© 2026 The Krapf Project

Have you seen how the Lord your God carried you through the wilderness, as a father carries his son? Let this inspire wonder: "Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" We speak of condescension, but what separates one creature—or worm—from another? What is God, and what are we—frail, unworthy, and guilty? Let this awaken gratitude and move your whole soul to bless his holy Name: "To him that led his people in the wilderness; for his mercy endureth for ever."

Let this encourage you: you have not yet reached the rest and inheritance the Lord your God gives you, but he is with you on the way as your Father, fulfilling all that relationship requires. He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." Draw hope for the future from the past: "because he has been your help, therefore under the shadow of his wings rejoice."

Let him be your example. Job was a father to the poor, not a tyrant or taskmaster. Be kind as well as generous. Follow God. The fatherless find mercy in him; let them find it in you, too. "Be ye merciful, even as your Father which is in heaven is merciful."

Recommend him to others, saying, "Come with us, and we will do you good, for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." Oh, that the young entering this wilderness world would place themselves in his care and ask him to guide their youth! Oh, that the bereaved would remember Him who can more than make up for the losses that cause them grief. "When my father and my mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up."

This sermon is taken from William Jay's devotional, Morning and Evening Exercises (January 28, Morning), first published in 1854.