

Deuteronomy 8:1-10

Dr. Steven R. Cook

“All the commandments [מצְוֹת *mitsvah* – *commandments* – here, the whole corpus of laws] that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore *to give* to your forefathers [i.e., that obedience may lead to God’s blessings].² “You shall remember [זָכַר *zakar* - intentionally recall to mind; cf. Deut 5:15; 7:18; 8:18; 9:7; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 32:7] all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years [providentially guiding], that He might humble you [i.e., teach His people to depend on Him], testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not [the test would reveal the health of their relationship with Him].³ “He humbled you and let you be hungry [i.e., intentionally placed them in difficult places], and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD [what comes from the mouth of God represents His revealed will. Jesus cited this verse when being tested by Satan to demonstrate that spiritual nourishment is more important than physical; see Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4].⁴ “Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years [God’s logistical grace].⁵ “Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son [to develop into spiritual maturity].⁶ “Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.⁷ “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land [i.e., abundant in what it supplies], a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills;⁸ a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey;⁹ a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything [unlike their time in the wilderness]; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper [mine for its mineral wealth].¹⁰ “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you [blessing God is the proper response to His goodness].

Summary:

The central idea of this text is that God’s people were to obey His commands that they might receive His blessings, which come after they learn humility and to trust and bless Him for His goodness.

Moses opens this pericope with the statement, “All the commandments that I am commanding you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the LORD swore *to give* to your forefathers” (Deut

8:1). God desired to bless and multiply His people by giving them the land He'd promised to the patriarchs, but according to the Mosaic Covenant, the inheritance was conditioned on their obedience to Him. Moses used the Hebrew word מצוה *mitsvah* which, here, referred to the whole corpus of laws he was providing.

Moses' instruction included remembering their past and God's testing them during the forty years of wilderness wandering. Moses said, "You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not" (Deut 8:2). Moses used the Hebrew verb זָכַר *zakar*, translated *remember*, several times in His address to the nation (see Deut 5:15; 7:18; 8:18; 9:7; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 32:7). The Israelites were to intentionally recall to mind God's forty years of guidance in the wilderness for the purpose of humbling them, to test them, in order to reveal what was in their hearts. Remembering God, His commands and blessings, is set against the danger of forgetting, which will lead to ruin (Deut 4:9, 23, 31; 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 9:7; 25:19). And how did God train His people? Moses said, "He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD" (Deut 8:3). Spiritual nourishment is more valuable than physical nourishment. Jack Deere writes:

In the desert they could not produce their own food but had to depend on God for food and thus for their very lives. When Moses reminded them that they did not live on bread alone he meant that even their food was decreed by the word of God. They had manna because it came by His command. It was therefore ultimately not bread that kept them alive but His word!¹

Thomas Constable adds:

God humbled the Israelites in the sense that He sought to teach them to have a realistic awareness of their dependence on Himself for all their needs. This is true humility. God's provision of manna to eat and clothing to wear should have taught the people that they were dependent on His provision for all their needs, not just food and clothing.²

¹ Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 278.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 8:1.

God intentionally placed His people in difficult places in order to reveal what was in their hearts and to educate them that He is their provider. Jesus cited Deuteronomy 8:3 when being tested by Satan to demonstrate that spiritual nourishment is more important than physical (see Matt 4:4; Luke 4:4). Part of God’s instruction included displays of His logistical grace, as Moses revealed, “Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years” (Deut 8:4). God supernaturally provided for His people, meeting all their basic needs. The point was that they were to learn something. It was revealed to them, “Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son” (Deut 8:5). God wanted His people to mature and He used suffering as a vehicle to help make that happen. Warren Wiersbe writes:

Discipline is “child training,” the preparation of the child for responsible adulthood. A judge justly punishes a convicted criminal in order to protect society and uphold the law, but a father lovingly disciplines a child to help that child mature. Discipline is an evidence of God’s love and of our membership in God’s family (Heb. 12:5–8; Prov. 3:11–12). When you think of the Lord’s discipline of His children, don’t envision an angry parent punishing a child. Rather, see a loving Father challenging His children to exercise their muscles (physical and mental) so they will mature and be able to live like dependable adults. When we’re being disciplined, the secret of growth is to humble ourselves and submit to God’s will (Deut. 8:2–3; Heb. 12:9–10). To resist God’s chastening is to harden our hearts and resist the Father’s will. Like an athlete in training, we must exercise ourselves and use each trial as an opportunity for growth.³

Obedience leads to maturity and maturity opens up many of God’s blessings. For Israel to receive what God had for them, they were to follow His commands and walk with Him. They were instructed, “Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him” (Deut 8:6). God was to be feared as the One who holds the power to bless and punish. And Moses describes the good land that was before them, saying, “For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing forth in valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land where you will eat food without scarcity, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper” (Deut 8:7-9). The land of Canaan was rich with resources which stood in contrast to their wilderness experience. And the proper response to God’s goodness

³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1999), 61-62.

was for His people to bless Him. The words given to them were, “When you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you” (Deut 8:10). An attitude of gratitude was not only the proper response to God’s goodness, but it also helped the Israelites remember the Lord as an expression of faith.

As Christians, God has secured our salvation by means of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died in our place and paid the penalty for our sin and redeemed us from Satan’s captivity (Col 1:13-14). As believers, we are forgiven all our sins (Eph 1:7), and gifted with eternal life (John 10:28) and God’s own righteousness (2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9). As children of God (John 1:12), the Lord desires that we advance from spiritual infancy to adulthood (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Pet 2:2). This requires years of learning and living God’s Word (2 Tim 2:15; 3:16-17), and making good choices to live by faith (Heb 10:38; 11:6). The Lord also uses adversity as opportunities to live by faith and grow (Rom 5:3-5; Jam 1:2-4). How we respond to trials determines whether we advance, stagnate, or regress. But we must also be on guard against failing the prosperity test, lest we take our eyes off the Lord and focus on riches instead.

The Bible teaches that God owns everything. Moses said, “to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it” (Deut 10:14). David wrote, “Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone” (1 Ch 29:12; cf. Psa 24:1; 89:11; Hag 2:8). Paul said:

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (1 Tim 6:17-19)

It is God who gives wealth as a blessing to us. However, we should see ourselves as stewards of His resources and be ready to use what He’s provided to help advance His people and purposes in the world. Being open-handed as a Christian is the proper attitude, “for God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7).