

Deuteronomy 8:11-20

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“Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God [שָׁכַח *shakach* – *to forget, let slip from memory*; cf. Deut 4:9, 23; 6:12; 8:14, 19; 9:7; 25:19] by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today [disobedience and ingratitude start the journey into idolatry];¹² otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived *in them*,¹³ and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies,¹⁴ then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.¹⁵ “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint.¹⁶ “In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you [concerning whether they would trust and praise Him], to do good for you in the end [God is concerned with the end result of His training].¹⁷ “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.’ [falsely thinking their blessing was the result of self-sufficiency]¹⁸ “But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth [God provides the ability and opportunity for His people to succeed], that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day [the eternal God is able to keep His covenant].¹⁹ “It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them [a treasonous act], I testify against you today that you will surely perish.²⁰ “Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish [if Israel chose to act like the pagan nations, they would perish like them as well]; because you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God [this destruction would come as a result of their own sinful choices].

Summary:

The main idea of this pericope is that Israel faced a real danger in the prosperity that lay ahead of them. The acquisition and accumulation of wealth might lead to pride in which God’s people think they don’t need the Lord, forget to obey and praise Him, and turn to idolatry and bring about their own ruin. If Israel would keep the Lord’s commands and walk in His ways and fear Him, then all would be well (Deut 8:6). Blessing or cursing was their choice (cf. Deut 11:26-28). Though Israel faced the threat of Canaan before them, there was a greater danger that God’s people would forget the Lord who liberated and prospered them. Moses issued a warning, saying, “Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes which I am commanding you today” (Deut 8:11, cf., 14,

19). To forget the Lord meant Israel would not obey Him, nor recognize Him in fear and worship. Israel was to know that disobedience and ingratitude would start them on the journey that would lead to idolatry and their eventual ruin.

The danger is expressed in a series of actions that might lead to Israel being lifted in pride, as Moses wrote, “otherwise, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived *in them*, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply, and all that you have multiplies, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Deut 8:12-14). Prosperity can, over time, have an amnesic effect that leads to pride and an attitude of self-sufficiency. But Moses reminds them about God’s deliverance, saying, “He led you through the great and terrible wilderness, *with its* fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; He brought water for you out of the rock of flint. In the wilderness He fed you manna which your fathers did not know” (Deut 8:15-16a). Moses provides a series of verbs—each in the hiphil stem—revealing God as the causal agent who *led* them through the wilderness, who *brought* water from the rock, and who *fed* them manna. God was the provider who met their basic needs. From the Israelite perspective, this was a difficult time in which they did not enjoy an abundance of resources and when their vulnerability was apparent every day. However, the Lord was training them to trust Him, to rely on His moment-by-moment provisions, in order that they might humbly rely on Him and not themselves or others. Moses explains God’s intention behind the testing, saying, “that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do good for you in the end” (Deut 8:16b). God desired to do good for Israel, but humility in the heart was more important than the blessing in their hands. Moses then states, “Otherwise, you may say in your heart, ‘My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth’” (Deut 8:17). This would be a form of thievery, in which they would take credit for the blessing God provided, falsely believing they had been their own savior and had met all their own needs. To mitigate against this danger, Moses instructs them, saying, “But you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who is giving you power to make wealth, that He may confirm His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as *it is* this day” (Deut 8:18). As repeated before, Moses calls on God’s people to regulate their thoughts and consciously and consistently recognize God in their lives as the One who empowers them to make wealth. The blessing they would enjoy was part of the covenant God has established with their fathers, and He would be faithful to keep His word to them.

For the third time in this pericope Moses issues a warning about forgetting God, saying, “It shall come about if you ever forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I testify against you today that you will surely perish. Like the nations that the LORD makes to perish before you, so you shall perish; because

you would not listen to the voice of the LORD your God” (Deut 8:19-20). If Israel chose to act like the pagan nations, God would cause them to perish like them.

Whether facing tests of adversity or prosperity, the believer is always to respond in faith and gratitude to the Lord. Paul states, “in everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Th 5:18), and, “give thanks for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father” (Eph 5:20). And the writer to the Hebrews tells us, “let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15). God is ultimately in control of life, whether in hardship or blessing (Eccl 7:14; cf. Job 2:9-10; Isa 45:5-7), and He wants us to keep our focus on Him in everything. Though it is our proclivity to run from trials—which may not be wrong in itself—in doing so, we might miss what God is working to accomplish in our hearts; namely, humility. But we must let God have His work in our lives so that humility is present, not only in adversity, but also in times of blessing. Whatever the situation, we are called to live by faith, which means we look to God and rely on Him to guide and sustain us in each moment. Part of that expression of faith is seeing life from the divine perspective and not letting circumstances, or the attitudes and actions of others dictate our response. Though Joseph had been mistreated by his brothers and sold into slavery, yet he operated from divine viewpoint and said to them, “As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen 50:20). Joseph realized God used the sinful attitudes and actions of his brothers to accomplish His greater good. When Job lost his family and business, he said, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). Though Job suffered and grieved, it did not destroy his divine viewpoint perspective or his faith response of praise to God. When Peter and the apostles were flogged for preaching about Jesus, Luke tells us, “they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name” (Acts 5:41). Though they suffered physical pain from the beating, it did not diminish their faith or praise response. When Paul and Silas had been beaten with rods and thrown into prison, Luke informs us they “were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). Again, we see where God’s people lived by faith and worshipped Him in spite of their difficult situations. As Christians, we cannot always control adversity, but neither should we be controlled by it. God wants us to be humble and to seek Him in everything, whether trials or blessings. How we respond is up to us. If we fail to live by faith, then our spiritual development stalls, and we face the danger of regressing into crippling fear. However, if we respond in faith, this will enable us to handle the situation and also strengthen us for future circumstances.