

Remember the Wilderness Days

HN 2/10/05 pm

Reading: Deuteronomy 8, Exodus 15:20-16:8

Study Text: Deuteronomy 8:1-6

Sing Psalms: 67; 66:1-5; 66:6-11; 66:16-20

Millions of people are trapped in the cycle of poverty. To break out of this some will do everything they can to send one son off to be educated. The family will work extra hard and they will go without things in order to pay for the son's education. With education the son will be able to get a good job and then be able to help his family.

But there is a risk in such plans. Such plans do not always work out. Why not? When the son gets educated and gets a good job in the city he may not remember his poor family back in the village. He may forget the poverty from which he was delivered through the sacrifices of his family.

With great power the Lord brought the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt. They were poor slaves there but they saw how the Lord destroyed Pharaoh and his army in the Red Sea. They saw how he led them through the wilderness until they were now ready to enter their own land.

Remember where you have come from was the lesson Moses pressed upon these people again and again. He knew that in the holy land everything would be different. They would face many changes in the way they lived. They would face new responsibilities, new challenges, and new temptations. Moses knew they were liable to forget their days in the wilderness, the days when the Lord was preparing them for life in the land they were going in to possess.

Commandments

There would be many changes but some things would not change. God does not change and his word does not change. The commandments which the Lord gave under the terms of the covenant he made with his people would not change. You must be careful to observe these said Moses that you may live and multiply in this good land (8:1, 6).

One of the biggest changes we experience in life is leaving home. After living with parents who tell us what to do and having everything provided we enter into the big wide world. Our parents taught us many things, they taught us how to live, but will we be wise and follow their instructions? 'Now remember all I taught you son' the father will say as his son goes off to college or to his first job. 'Remember my teaching that all may go well for you. If you don't then disaster will surely come upon you'.

We continue to face changes in life. We may find ourselves suddenly in a land of wealth and prosperity as with the Israelites. We may find ourselves in the presence of evil and idolatry as with the Israelites. We may find ourselves married or suddenly single again. We may find ourselves made redundant and out of work. How will we cope, how will we hold up under such changes?

Remember *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever* (Hebrews 13:8) Remember all will pass away but the word of the Lord stands forever (Matthew 24:35). In the Lord you have a firm anchor for your soul. In the Bible you have the words of life that nothing in this world can take from you. Be careful to heed these words and you will live and not die.

Testing

Testing times are learning times. We listen and learn most keenly during times of suffering. Some lessons can only be learnt in the midst of trouble. We all learn by our mistakes – or the mistakes of others. Often our troubles are from the Lord or are allowed by the Lord that we might be tested, that we might be refined as silver is refined to make it pure, to make it useful (Psalm 66:10) .

The Lord God led the children of Israel through the wilderness for forty years that he might test them to know what was in their heart (8:2). The Lord had previously tested Abraham to see what was in his heart – he told him to go to Moriah and sacrifice his son there (Genesis 22). The Lord allowed Job to be tested – Satan wanted to sift him as wheat. His possessions and his family all destroyed, his wife left him and then Satan attacked his body. Job was sorely tested but he refused to turn away from God. Like Abraham he came through to receive rich blessings in the Lord.

Food and Water

Afflict a man in his body, touch his flesh, deny him food and water and you will see what is in his heart. Satan knows this. God knows this. Most women know this. There is a saying that goes like this – the quickest way to a man's heart is through his stomach. It is usually spoken in the positive sense – if you feed a man well you will gain his love. But there is also the negative side. If you deny a man food you may test that love. Some marriages come under intense strain if a man is not satisfied with the food dished up to him.

The Lord allowed his people to hunger to test their faithfulness to him (8:2, 3). He brought them through the Red Sea in a mighty, 'unforgettable' deliverance. They sang and danced as they praised the Lord. But within three days it was a different story – they were complaining 'what shall we drink' (Exodus 15:24). The Lord was testing them. Would they continue to praise him in the bad times as they had in the good? Would they continue to listen to him and heed his word?

After another six weeks or so they were complaining again – this time because of hunger. *You have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger* (Exodus 16:3). But they did not perish as they feared. The Lord provided them with water to drink – he brought water out of a hard, dry rock. He sent them bread from heaven, *manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know* (8:3).

In all this testing the Lord was teaching them. He was teaching them to trust him, to trust the word he spoke. He was teaching them to depend upon him and not upon themselves. How could they get food and water in the desert?

Man shall not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (8:3). This was the profound truth the Lord was teaching them.

Jesus knew this truth for he quoted this very Scripture to Satan when he was being tested. He taught this truth to his disciples. *Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you* said Jesus (Matthew 6:33). Have you learnt this truth? How bad would things have to get before you would turn from the Lord? All who belong to Christ will suffer persecution (II Timothy 3:12).

In giving them manna to eat the Lord was teaching his people important lessons. They remembered the manna for generations to come (John 6:31). But did they remember the ‘manna lessons’. Did they remember what the Lord was teaching their fathers? To humble you and to know what was in your heart.

At least three important lessons emerged in the manna.

Firstly – the people did not have to work for it. They simply went out to gather it – not unlike the way it was in the beginning in the garden for Adam. They gathered it every morning – it was their daily bread. The Lord provided for them each and every day for forty years.

Secondly – he provided as much as they needed – no more and no less. He allowed them to hunger at first but then provided the manna to satisfy their hunger. ‘Only gather sufficient for yourself each day’ Moses told them. Did they listen? There were some whose hearts were like our modern day CEOs – they tried to grab as much as they could (who knows what they were going to do with it – the piles of manna I mean). Like a pastor in India often said – rich or poor we all have the same size stomachs. A million dollars certainly buys more food than I can eat in a year! *He who gathered much had nothing left over and he who gathered little had not lack* (Exodus 16:18).

And the third lesson from the manna concerned the Sabbath rest, the holy Sabbath to the Lord (Exodus 16:23). Gather twice as much on the day before for their will be no gathering on the Sabbath they were told. But some went out anyway and they found none. The Lord says ‘take rest and keep this day holy’. Why go out and work when the extra you get goes to the tax man anyway!

Clothes

Your garments did not wear out nor did your foot swell these forty years (8:4). Not just food and water but also their clothes and shelter were provided by the Lord. He did not give new clothes but made it that the clothes they had did not wear out. They would not suffer from the sun by day or in the cold at night. The Lord did not leave them naked or destitute, nor did not let their health deteriorate when they needed to keep moving.

Women are especially prone to wanting new clothes and to keeping up with the fashion. Some get quite upset when there is not enough money to get the new dress they want. 'Why don't you get a better job so I can get new clothes like everyone else' they demand. Let us remember that the Lord will not leave us naked and destitute. Let us look to him and be content with what he provides.

The people of God learnt these lessons as the Lord led them through the wilderness. They were taught to depend entirely upon the Lord. They were taught to trust the Lord and to obey his commandments for *man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord*. Would they remember this when they came into the rich land of Canaan? How well have you learnt these lessons? In Australia you live in a rich and prosperous land.

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