

# Not By Bread Alone (Deuteronomy 8:1-20)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

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## I. Background / Review

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** features important speeches (perhaps three) that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. The second of those begins in **Deuteronomy 5**, with Moses recounting the Lord giving the 10 Commandments at Mount Sinai.
- c. In **Deuteronomy 8**, this speech by Moses continues. It includes one of the most famous lines from the Old Testament, one quoted by Jesus when He was tempted by Satan. It also includes a powerful warning of what will happen if we forget the Lord and stray after times of prosperity come.

## II. The Lord Dealt Harshly with Them, for a Reason

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 8:1-5**.
- b. It says here that the Lord “dealt harshly with” His people while they were in the Wilderness (LXX, OSB).
  - i. Another translation of the LXX renders this “the Lord *afflicted* (you)”.
  - ii. Note that versions based on the Masoretic Text generally are translated “the Lord *humbled* you”.
- c. He dealt *harshly* with them *to test them, to know what was in their hearts*.
  - i. **Question:** Why does He need to *test people with suffering*? Couldn’t God simply *look into* our hearts to see what is in them?
    1. In my own profession of civil engineering, we often test materials (such as concrete) before they are placed in construction.
    2. There are (in general) two types of testing for concrete:
      - a. (Traditional) *destructive testing*, such as of a test cylinder. Put it under pressure and increase the pressure until the test cylinder fails.
      - b. *Nondestructive testing* (utilizing ultrasonic, x-ray, radioactive, or other technologies)

- d. Again, while God does not necessarily increase the pressure on us until we exceed the “breaking point”, He does put us through difficult tests (in which some people do fail). Why does He do that?
  - i. I am not sure I can answer the “why” part.
  - ii. However, it is clear throughout the Scriptures that God has always used trials to test the faith of those following Him.
- e. The theme that the Lord deliberately afflicts His people to test them is woven throughout the Scriptures.
  - i. Example of someone’s faith being tested: Abraham, the “father of faith” called to sacrifice Isaac.
    - 1. Read **Genesis 22:1-3**.
    - 2. Read **Genesis 22:9-12**.
      - a. Abraham passed this test of his faith. Then angel of the Lord says, “*Now I know that you fear God...*”
    - 3. **Questions:** Do you think God only tested Abraham, or did he also test many others in the Scriptures? More important, do you think *He continues to test us today*, in similar ways?
  - ii. Read **Zechariah 13:7-9**.
    - 1. The remnant will be brought through the fire, to be tested as gold or silver would be tested and refined/purified.
    - 2. Those who made it through that severe test successfully would be God’s treasured people.
  - iii. Read **1 Peter 1:6-9**.
    - 1. In this life we may face various trials that grieve us.
    - 2. This is *to test the genuineness of our faith*, as gold that is tested in fire (but our faith is much more precious than even gold).
    - 3. Don’t think it is strange when suffering and testing come.
- f. Consider the perspective of Cyprian (bishop of the church in Carthage, North Africa during a time of severe persecution; died 258 AD) regarding Christians being tested with hardship and suffering.
  - i. “Moreover, if the Christian know and keep fast under what condition and what law he has believed, he will be aware that he must suffer

more than others in the world, since he must struggle more with the attacks of the devil....

- ii. "...Thus Job, after the loss of his wealth, after the death of his children, grievously afflicted, moreover, with sores and worms, was not overcome, but proved; since in his very struggles and anguish, showing forth the patience of a religious mind, he says, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, naked also I shall go under the earth: the Lord gave, the Lord hath taken away; as it seemed fit to the Lord, so it hath been done. Blessed be the name of the Lord' (**Job 1:21**)....
- iii. "...Righteous men have ever possessed this endurance. The apostles maintained this discipline from the law of the Lord, not to murmur in adversity, but to accept bravely and patiently whatever things happen in the world; since the people of the Jews in this matter always offended, that they constantly murmured against God, as the Lord God bears witness in the book of Numbers, saying, 'Let their murmuring cease from me, and they shall not die.' (**Numbers 17:10**) We must not murmur in adversity, beloved brethren, but we must bear with patience and courage whatever happens, since it is written, 'The sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a contrite and humbled heart God does not despise;' (**Psalms 51:17**) since also in Deuteronomy the Holy Spirit warns by Moses, and says, 'The Lord your God will vex you, and will bring hunger upon you; and it shall be known in your heart if you have well kept His commandments or not.' (**Deuteronomy 8:2**) And again: 'The Lord your God proves [tests] you, that He may know whether you love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul.' (**Deuteronomy 13:3**)
- iv. "Thus Abraham pleased God, who, that he might please God, did not shrink even from losing his son, or from doing an act of parricide [= *intentional killing one's own father, child or other close relative*]. You, who cannot endure to lose your son by the law and lot of mortality, what would you do if you were bidden to slay your son? The fear and faith of God ought to make you prepared for everything, although it should be the loss of private estate, although the constant and cruel harassment of your limbs by agonizing disorders, although the deadly and mournful wrench from wife, from children, from departing dear ones; Let not these things be offences to you, but battles: nor let them weaken nor break the Christian's faith, but rather show forth his strength in the struggle, since all the injury inflicted by present troubles is to be despised in the assurance of future blessings.
- v. "Unless the battle has preceded, there cannot be a victory: when there shall have been, in the onset of battle, the victory, then also the crown

is given to the victors. For the helmsman is recognised in the tempest; in the warfare the soldier is proved. It is a wanton display when there is no danger. Struggle in adversity is the trial of the truth. The tree which is deeply founded in its root is not moved by the onset of winds, and the ship which is compacted of solid timbers is beaten by the waves and is not shattered; and when the threshing-floor brings out the corn, the strong and robust grains despise the winds, while the empty chaff is carried away by the blast that falls upon it.

- vi. “Thus, moreover, the Apostle Paul, after shipwrecks, after scourgings, after many and grievous tortures of the flesh and body, says that he is not grieved, but benefited by his adversity, in order that while he is sorely afflicted he might more truly be proved. ‘There was given to me,’ he says, ‘a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be lifted up: for which thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me; and He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee, for strength is made perfect in weakness.’ (**2 Corinthians 12:7-8**)
  
- vii. “When, therefore, weakness and inefficiency and any destruction seize us, then our strength is made perfect; then our faith, if when tried it shall stand fast, is crowned; as it is written, ‘The furnace trieth the vessels of the potter, and the trial of tribulation just men’ (**Sirach 27:5**). This, in short, is the difference between us and others who know not God, that in misfortune they complain and murmur, while adversity does not call us away from the truth of virtue and faith, but strengthens us by its suffering.”
  - 1. **Cyprian’s Main Point:** Christians embrace trials and hardship, since it proves and refines our faith. Unlike those in the world, we do not complain when facing these challenges.
  - 2. (Source: Cyprian, *Treatises VII: On the Mortality*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 471–472)
  
- g. Also, let us not forget that even Jesus had to be *perfected* [= *made complete*] through suffering.
  - i. “though He was a Son, yet *He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected*, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him,” (**Hebrews 5:8–9**, NKJV)
  - ii. Jesus Himself, although without sin, had to be perfected (made complete) through suffering.

- iii. He offers salvation to all who obey Him (who should expect to undergo similar trials of suffering to prove and refine our own faith).

### III. Why the Lord Fed the Israelites with Manna

- a. After being fed with manna for 40 years, Moses finally explains why the Lord chose that unusual way to feed and sustain them in the Wilderness.
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 8:3**.
- c. History and background for the manna.
  - i. Read **Exodus 16:1-5** and **16:9-36**.
    1. They ate the manna every day but gathered it only 6 days per week (since no work to collect it was permitted on the Sabbath).
    2. Clear and simple instructions, but some people did not follow those.
      - a. Gather in the morning.
      - b. They can't store it up (except to avoid working on the Sabbath). If they disobeyed this command, the manna on the second day (except on the Sabbath) would turn into a disgusting, maggot-infested mess.
    3. Moses was called to keep a pot of the manna before the ark as a reminder to future generations. The Lord wanted to make sure they would never forget this miraculous way He had fed them when they were in the Wilderness!
      - a. In **Deuteronomy 8:3** Moses reveals why this lesson of the manna was so important. It was to teach the people a crucial lesson about the word of God.
  - ii. Read **Numbers 11:4-9**.
    1. While the manna was sweet and pleasant to eat and could be prepared in many ways, the people became bored with it. They looked back longingly to the varied food of Egypt (in the old life of slavery) which they enjoyed in the past.
    2. The Lord gave them what they craved (meat) until it "came out of their nostrils". Then He struck them with a plague, and their bodies were buried at a place that would be called "Graves of Lust".

- d. Lessons for us from the manna.
  - i. God could have fed the Israelites in many ways while they were in the Wilderness, but He chose this specific way, in order to teach them an extremely valuable lesson for the future (after the manna stopped).
    - 1. The exodus journey provides us with a ‘map’ of our own spiritual journey, as Paul explained in **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**.
      - a. Egypt represented the old life in spiritual bondage, in the kingdom of darkness under the rule of Satan (who, like Pharaoh, does not want to let us go).
      - b. The Red Sea crossing foreshadowed Christian baptism.
      - c. The 40 years in the Wilderness, a time of testing, represented the Christian life, the church in the world.
        - i. Those in the Wilderness, on their journey “all ate the same spiritual food,” (**1 Corinthians 10:3**, NKJV)
        - ii. This is a reference to the manna that sustained them every day.
      - d. The Promised Land represented the ultimate goal we look forward to, for those who have been faithful to the end of their journey.
    - ii. We must live by the spiritual bread, “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God”, and not by physical bread alone.
    - iii. The Scriptures are to be the manna that sustains us every day in this Wilderness (between baptism and death). Without this manna, we will perish along the way and starve.
    - iv. We must eat it every day, gathering it on a daily basis, not just once a week. Every household needs to do this.
      - 1. Some early Christians saw special value in doing this *in the morning*, before the heat of the day (when the sun came up and burned / melted it away).
        - a. See an interesting passage that discusses this, in **Wisdom of Solomon 16:20-29**.
        - b. Note that while this mysterious bread from heaven could be baked in fire or boiled, it would melt away in the morning rays of the sun.

- c. While there is no rule regarding what time of day is best to read the Scriptures, many Christians over the ages have found it to be to their benefit to start their day by reading and meditating on the word of God before doing anything else.
2. I ask people who are not reading the Bible every day (because they claim they are too busy): “Did you manage to *find the time today* to eat your (physical) food?”
  - a. Their answer is typically, “Yes, of course.”
    - i. I think you can guess what my response to that is!
  - b. We need to see that we will starve to death spiritually, and waste away if we are not regularly (daily) feeding on the Scriptures, which proceeded from the mouth of God.
    - i. Recall that the manna tasted like honey (**Exodus 16:31**).
    - ii. Also, the word of God (the Scriptures) is described as being sweet to our taste, like honey (**Psalm 118/119:102**).
3. Recall that while the manna had a pleasant taste, the people became bored with it over time, and their flesh craved the variety of food they had enjoyed back in Egypt (**Numbers 11:4-9**).
  - a. Similarly, some Christians over time become ‘bored’ with reading the Scriptures every day. As a result they may turn to other things to read *instead of the Bible*.
  - b. In many cases, the books or articles they turn to may be good and helpful (for example, early Christian writings, modern spiritual books, books about the Bible, or Biblical themes). However, while these things may be good to augment our reading of Scripture, in my opinion, they should never take the place of daily devotion to reading and meditating on the word of God!
  - c. **Challenge:** Do you see the Word of God as the only spiritual food that can sustain you for the long haul? Are you as devoted to feeding your soul every day as you are to feeding your body?

- i. Never tire of studying the word of God. Don't ever neglect it out of boredom, or attempt to replace it with other things. Find delight in it.
    - ii. This is the spiritual food God gave us.
    - iii. We need this every day, as the spiritual bread to sustain us on our spiritual journey in this Wilderness of life!
  4. People have asked me, "How have you managed to stay faithful for decades, especially in view of all the problems you experienced in various churches?" My frequent answer: "By being in the word of God on a daily basis."
    - a. Read **Psalm 1:1-3**.
      - i. Meditate on the Word of God day and night.
      - ii. Commit passages of Scripture to memory.
        1. Example of Jesus quoting this passage in **Matthew 4:1-4** in the face of first temptation.
    - b. Read **Psalm 118/119:9-16**.
      - i. A young man can keep his way pure by "hiding the Lord's teachings in his heart".
  5. I am inspired by the legacy of James A. Harding. He was a famous preacher in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century whose most enduring contribution may have been imparting his devotion to Word of God to others. Everywhere he went, he got people to commit to reading the Scriptures daily and to holding one another accountable for their reading.
    - a. I can think of nothing more important that I could leave behind, nothing that would have a more lasting impact for eternity.
    - b. It seems to me, that in the end, this type of impact is much greater than personal popularity, fame, or even thousands or millions of online teaching page views or 'followers'!

#### IV. Don't Forget the Lord When Prosperity Comes

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 8:6-20**.



- b. They had been tested by adversity (bondage in Egypt, affliction in the Wilderness for 40 years). One more test, a new one, was coming: the test of *prosperity*.
  - i. God was warning them that in the future they would have beautiful homes, sheep, cattle, wealth, etc. If, in the future, they FORGET God...
    - 1. Who brought them out of Egypt;
    - 2. Who brought them through the Wilderness desert; and
    - 3. Who fed them with manna and water from the rock, and
  - ii. If they become arrogant and take credit for all their wealth and accomplishments, and if they then FORGET the Lord and follow other 'gods'...
    - 1. He would destroy them, just as He had destroyed the other nations they faced.
- c. **Challenge for Us:**
  - i. Jesus warned us about the dangers of the third soil.
    - 1. "And some seed *fell among thorns*; and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no crop." (**Mark 4:7**, NKJV)
    - 2. "Now these are the ones *sown among thorns*; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful. But these are the ones sown on good ground, those who hear the word, accept it, and bear fruit: some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some a hundred." (**Mark 4:18-20**, NKJV)
  - ii. Paul also warned us about the dangers of wealth.
    - 1. Read **1 Timothy 6:6-10** and **6:17-19**.
- d. How we can overcome:
  - i. Remember. Never forget where we came from. Be reminded every day, every week, and every year what God has given us.
    - 1. Our human tendency is to forget and blend in with whatever is around us.
    - 2. Like Job, remember that we came into this world with nothing, and will depart with nothing (**Job 1:20-21**).

3. Remember where we came from. What God has delivered us from. Where we are headed without God.
4. Remember the fear of God.
5. Remember that Jesus is coming back, at any time, to judge all the living and the dead.
6. Keep our noses, minds, and hearts in the Scriptures to remember all the things God has done in the past.
7. Remember the warnings and encouragements of Jesus. Without Him, we can do nothing.
  - a. “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” (**John 15:5-6**, NKJV)

## V. Recap and Conclusion

- a. God tests His people, to find out how much we love Him.
- b. Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.
  - i. The manna was given to show us that we must rely on the Scriptures, the spiritual food God has given us, to sustain us every day on our own spiritual journey.
  - ii. Be devoted to the Scriptures. Read and meditate on them every day.
  - iii. Never tire of them. Delight in them, and never seek to replace their place with anything else.
- c. If we find material prosperity at some point in time in this life, realize that this provides another type of test for our hearts. Do not fail that test by forgetting the Lord when prosperity comes.
  - i. Never forget what the Lord has done for us, where we have come from, and where we are headed.