

## **The Problem of Prosperity** *Deuteronomy 8*

An elderly man lay in a hospital with his wife of 55 years sitting at his bedside. "Is that you, Ethel, at my side again?" he whispered. "Yes, dear," she answered.

He softly said to her, "Remember years ago when I was in the Veteran's Hospital? You were with me then. You were with me when we lost everything in a fire. And Ethel, when we were poor--you were with me there, too." The man sighed and said, "I tell you, Ethel, you're bad luck."

He didn't listen to the good advice that when you carve the Thanksgiving turkey, you are supposed to give the first piece to the person who prepared it.

Moses was equipping the new generation to enter and claim the Promised Land, and he knew that Canaan would be a place of temptation as well as a place of triumph.

When they conquered the nations in Canaan, the Israelites would inherit vast wealth and would be tempted to forget the Lord who had made their victories possible.

The second temptation would be for Israel to compromise with the pagan nations around them and not maintain their separated position as the people of the Lord.

Most people find it easier to handle adversity than prosperity, because adversity usually drives us closer to God as we seek His wisdom and help. When things are going well, we're prone to relax our spiritual disciplines, take our blessings for granted, and forget to "praise God from whom all blessings flow."

The material things that we wait for and sacrifice for seem to mean much more to us than the gifts that fall in our lap without our help.

Moses named some of the material blessings the Lord would give the Israelites in the Promised Land: large prosperous cities, houses filled with different kinds of wealth, wells, vineyards, and olive groves, as well as the land itself.

Whenever the Jews took water from the wells or fruit from the vines and trees, they should have looked up with gratitude to the Lord.

By their attitude and their words, Israel defied the Lord and proved that they neither loved Him nor trusted Him. Their bodies were in the camp of Israel, but their hearts were still in Egypt.

If God had not been gracious and long-suffering, He could have judged them severely; but He knows that His people are only clay.

*(Psalms 103:8-14) The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. {9} He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; {10} he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. {11} For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; {12} as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us.*

*{13} As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; {14} for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.*

### **1. Children in the wilderness**

The three essentials for Israel's conquest and enjoyment of the Promised Land were: listening to God's Word, remembering it, and obeying it.

As we walk through this world, we can't succeed without God's guidance, protection, and provision, and it also helps to have a good memory.

**God tests us ([Deut. 8:1-2](#)).** God knows what's in the hearts of His children, but His children don't always know—or want to know.

How we respond to the tests of life reveals what's really in our hearts, especially when those tests involve the everyday experience of life.

The people of Israel were frequently hungry and thirsty and weary from the journey, and it was on those occasions that they became fretful and critical.

Four times in these chapters Moses commands us to remember

*(Deuteronomy 8:2 NIV) Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.*

*(Deuteronomy 8:18 NIV) But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*

*(Deuteronomy 9:7 NIV) Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD.*

*(Deuteronomy 9:27 NIV) Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin.*

Four more times he admonishes us to forget not:

*(Deuteronomy 8:11 NIV) Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day.*

*(Deuteronomy 8:14 NIV) then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

*(Deuteronomy 8:19 NIV) If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed.*

*(Deuteronomy 9:7 NIV) Remember this and never forget how you provoked the LORD your God to anger in the desert. From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the LORD.*

The devil tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to bring out the best in us.

When God allows a difficult circumstance to test us, we will either trust Him and become more mature, or we will tempt Him and become more miserable.

The difference? Believing the promises of God and relying on the Lord to care for us and bring us through for His glory and our good.

**God teaches us ([Deut. 8:3](#)).**

*{3} He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

Each morning during their wilderness journey, God sent the Jewish people “angels’ food” ([Ps. 78:21-25](#)) to teach them to depend on Him for what they needed.

*(Psalms 78:21-25) When the LORD heard them, he was very angry; his fire broke out against Jacob, and his wrath rose against Israel, {22} for they did not believe in God or trust in his deliverance. {23} Yet he gave a command to the skies above and opened the doors of the heavens; {24} he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. {25} Men ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.*

When Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread ([Matt. 4:1-4](#)), Jesus quoted [Deuteronomy 8:3](#) and indicated that the Word of God is also the bread of God.

**God cares for us ([Deut. 8:4](#); [29:5](#)).**

*{4} Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.*

Not only did God feed the Jews “miracle bread” each morning, but He also kept their clothes from wearing out and their feet from swelling.

The three pressing questions of life for most people are, “What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What shall we wear?” ([Matt. 6:25-34](#)) and the Lord met all these needs for His people for forty years.

The same Lord who provided Israel’s needs without human means can provide our needs by using human means.

## **God disciplines us ([Deut. 8:5](#))**

*{5} Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.*

God saw the Children of Israel as His own children whom He greatly loved. After years of slavery in Egypt, the Jews had to learn what freedom was and how to use it responsibly.

We commonly think of “discipline” only as punishment for disobedience, but much more is involved.

Discipline is “child training,” the preparation of the child for responsible adulthood.

Discipline is an evidence of God’s love and of our membership in God’s family ([Heb. 12:5-8](#); [Prov. 3:11-12](#)).

## **Enjoying God’s blessing ([Deut. 8:6-9](#))**

*{6} Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and revering him. {7} For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land--a land with streams and pools of water, with springs flowing in the valleys and hills; {8} a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; {9} a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.*

The “key” that opened the door to the Promised Land was simple: obey God’s commandments, walk in His ways, and reverence Him ([v. 6](#)). If the people of Israel disobeyed God’s Word, walked in their own way, and showed no fear of the Lord, this would invite the judgment of God on the nation.

## **Forgetting God’s goodness ([Deut. 8:10-18](#))**

*{10} When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the LORD your God for the good land he has given you. {11} Be careful that you do not forget the LORD your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. {12} Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, {13} and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, {14} then your heart will become proud and you*

*will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. {15} He led you through the vast and dreadful desert, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. {16} He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. {17} You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." {18} But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today.*

There's peril in prosperity and comfort, for we may become so wrapped up in the blessings that we forget the One who gave us the blessings. For this reason, Moses admonished the Jews to praise God after they had eaten their meals so they wouldn't forget the Giver of every good and perfect gift.

### **Rejecting God's authority ([Deut. 8:19-20](#))**

*{19} If you ever forget the LORD your God and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today that you will surely be destroyed. {20} Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.*

The climax of this spiritual declension is that the "wealthy Israelites" would turn from the Lord, the true and living God, and start worshiping the false gods of their neighbors. Idolatry begins in the heart when gratitude to the Giver is replaced by greediness for the gifts.

An ungrateful heart can quickly become a haven for all sorts of sinful attitudes and appetites that cater to the flesh.

Prosperity—ingratitude—idolatry: three steps toward ruin. But these aren't ancient sins, for they're present in hearts, homes, businesses, and churches today.

*Matthew 11:20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. {21} "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. {22} But I tell you, it will be*

*more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. {23} And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. {24} But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."*

5 of the 10 miracles recorded in Matthew 8 and 9 were performed in these areas

The Greek word for *woe* expresses *sorrowful pity* at least as much as it does anger.

This is not the accent of one who is in a temper because his self-esteem has been touched; it is not the accent of one who is blazingly angry because he has been insulted.

It is the accent of sorrow, the accent of one who offered men the most precious thing in the world and saw it disregarded. Jesus' condemnation of sin is holy anger, but the anger comes, not from outraged pride, but from a broken heart.

**1. It was the sin of the people who forgot the responsibilities of privilege.** The greater our privileges have been, the greater is our condemnation if we fail to shoulder the responsibilities and accept the obligations which these privileges bring with them.

**2. It was the sin of indifference.**

These cities did not attack Jesus Christ; they did not drive him from their gates; they did not seek to crucify him; they simply disregarded him. Neglect can kill as much as persecution can. Indifference does not burn a religion to death; it freezes it to death. It does not behead it; it slowly suffocates the life out of it.

**3. And so we are face to face with one great threatening truth-it is also a sin to do nothing.**

*James 4:17 Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

Years ago a wealthy English family was entertaining friends at their home. As the children swam one ventured into the deep water and began to drown. The gardener heard the other children screaming and jumped into the water and saved the child. The youngsters name was Winston Churchill. Deeply grateful to the gardener, the parents asked how they could ever repay him. He hesitated, but then said "I wish my son could go to college someday to be a doctor. "He will" said Churchill's parents. "We will pay his way."

Years later when Sir Winston was Prime Minister, he became ill with pneumonia. The best physician the king could find was called to the bedside of the ailing leader. His name Sir Alexander Flemming, the developer of penecillin and the son of that gardener who long ago saved a drowning Winston. Churchill later said, "Rarely has a man owed his life twice to the same person."

As believers we owe a debt of gratitude and service to the Lord because He made us and He loves and He saved us.