

MAN DOES NOT LIVE ON BREAD ALONE

Deuteronomy 7:1-8:20

Key Verse: 8:3

He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors 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.

In Deuteronomy 7 and 8, Moses warns the Israelites of three potential snares that may ruin them in the Promised Land they were about to enter. He warned them about idol worship, desires for material things, and forgetting the grace of God while enjoying their prosperity. These are the same snares we must watch out for in our lives today. There are two kinds of faith. One is the weather vane faith that changes the direction by the wind. The other is the compass faith that points to the same direction no matter how strong the wind blows. Which faith do you have? Do you have the unwavering faith that is firmly based on the word of God even as your human situations change? Let us pay attention to the word of God in today's passage so that we may remain faithful to the Lord to the end, as we make our journey toward our Promised Land.

I. A PEOPLE HOLY TO THE LORD OUR GOD (7:1-26)

The Israelites were at an important juncture in their national history. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, they were about to cross the Jordan River to enter the Promised Land, a land flowing with milk and honey. They were excited, perhaps with a tinge of apprehension about their future. At this point, Moses, a servant of God, warned them in advance not to compromise with the Canaanites once they get there. Moses knew that the seven nations occupying the land (the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites) were larger and stronger than Israel (1). Only by God's grace, they would possess the land. Then they would face temptations to compromise. But they must not. They must destroy the enemies totally, making no treaty with them. Their children must not intermarry with them because the Canaanites would entice them to worship their idols. The Israelites should break down their altars and burn the idols in the fire.

There is a saying, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." The Canaanites had very strong culture and religious practices. But the Israelites were not immigrants. God wanted them to keep their identity as a holy nation people. Why? Look at verses 6-8. *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.* We are reminded here that God's people are holy because God chose them--not because they had any innate goodness or any human quality that made them

worthy of his choosing. We are chosen by God's grace alone. We are a people holy to the Lord our God, not because who we are, but because who he is. We should not be proud or self-righteous. God brought the Israelites out of slavery because of his covenant with Abraham. God saved us from our sin and death only by his grace and only through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

What else should we know about our God? Look at verse 9. *Know therefore that the Lord your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments.* What does it mean the Lord our God is God? Our God is God. He is not an idol who does not and cannot respond to people who bow down to him. Our God is God. He created the heavens and the earth. He is the source of our lives. He knows us personally and cares about each of us. Our God is God. He is spirit. He is invisible. He is not mortal. He is forever. In other words, we should know and honor God as God. What does this God do for us? He is the faithful God who keeps his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. Our God wants us to obey his words, not just out of a sense of duty as the Pharisees in Jesus' time did, but out of love for him. He loves us and keeps his covenant of love. But we should also know that God will punish those who hate him (10). Our God is the God of love and also the God of righteousness.

Knowing who God is, Moses teaches us that we should obey God's words. He says in verse 11: *Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today.* Knowing that God loves us and that in his love he gave us his laws (to set boundaries to make us a holy people), we must follow his words. What blessings did God promise to those who follow his commands and laws? Look at verses 12-13a. *If you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, then the Lord your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your ancestors. He will love you and bless you and increase your numbers.* Then Moses described God's blessings in very practical terms, perhaps to help them to have a clear vision in their minds, including abundant harvest from their land (grain, wine and olive oil), fruitful reproduction of their people and livestock, and a nation of healthy people that does not require an expensive health care system. It is a blessing to be God's people!

Still Moses saw fear in the eyes of his people. They were saying to themselves, "These nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out?" (17) Moses knew that their fear was real. How did he help them? How can we overcome our fear about the uncertainty in our future? Look at verses 18-19. *But do not be afraid of them; remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials, the signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm, with which the Lord your God brought you out. The Lord your God will do the same to all the peoples you now fear.* Moses gave them a history lesson. They could overcome their fear if only they remembered well what the Lord God did to Pharaoh. The Egyptian Empire was a superpower nation. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. But with his mighty hands and outstretched arm, God brought them out of their slavery. God led them with many signs and wonders. He parted the Red Sea so that they could pass through it as on dry land. This God would do the same to the Canaanites they now

feared. Moses reassured them in verses 21-22: *“Do not be terrified by them, for the Lord your God, who is among you, is a great and awesome God. The Lord your God will drive out those nations before you, little by little. You will not be allowed to eliminate them all at once, or the wild animals will multiply around you.”* Sometimes, we feel that God’s work among us is too slow. We wish our great and awesome God would routinely perform miracles among us, raising up humble and faithful disciples by dozens every year. But God knows us better than we do. He works among us, little by little. To have faith means to believe that God is working among us in his own way and in his own time. We have to see this with spiritual eyes and follow his words no matter what.

Moses once again warned the Israelites to deal with the Canaanite idols decisively. Look at verses 25-26. *The images of their gods you are to burn in the fire. Do not covet the silver and gold on them, and do not take it for yourselves, or you will be ensnared by it, for it is detestable to the Lord your God. Do not bring a detestable thing into your house or you, like it, will be set apart for destruction. Regard it as vile and utterly detest it, for it is set apart for destruction.* The Canaanite idols had gold and silver on them that would tempt the Israelites. Living in this material-oriented world, money can easily become a god. We can be ensnared by it if we don’t deal with it decisively.

Today, our children and we are constantly tempted to assimilate into the unbelieving culture of our generation. In the U.S., our children are pressured into conforming to the culture of regarding sin as alternative lifestyle, sex outside marriage as no big deal, and pleasure-seeking activities as cool thing to pursue. Not only in the U.S. but in many other societies, our children face the same temptations that the Israelites did in Canaan. The pressure to conform to the godless culture is so strong and dangerous that if we give in and compromise just a little bit, we are deep into it before we realize it. Do you remember Lot, Abraham’s nephew, in Genesis? He pitched his tent just outside Sodom. He was thinking, “I am not inside the sin city. My family is fine.” Before he knew it, however, his family was not only inside the city but deeply into the sinful culture. His two daughters were engaged to the men of the city who regarded God’s warning as joke. His wife became a pillar of salt because she looked back the burning city against God’s warning. A lesson for us is that small compromise can lead to dangerous situations.

II. DO NOT FORGET THE LORD (8:1-20)

Look at verse 1. *Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today, so that you may live and increase and may enter and possess the land the Lord promised on oath to your ancestors.* In his speeches to the Israelites, Moses used words such as “pay attention” (7:12), “be careful to follow” (7:12; 8:1,11) and “remember” (8:2,18) – the same words that God used when he instructed Moses (5:32; 6:3,12). God knew they would not obey his words if they had a casual attitude. If they followed God with feelings only, they would fail miserably. He said in verse 2. *Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.* Moses taught them that their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness was not meaningless.

God had a purpose for them. It was to train them so that they could live as a holy people in the Promised Land.

Let us read verse 3 together. *He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors 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.* There was nothing in the desert. Only rocks, dirt and scorpions. They had no ability to sustain life there. In this situation, God provided everything for them. He sent manna from heaven for bread. He sent quails for meat. Water gushed out from rocks. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell during the forty years of walking through the desert (3). God taught them he is the God who takes care of those who follow his words. The purpose of the wilderness training was to teach the Israelites not to depend on their human ability, but to depend on God. God disciplined them, as a loving father disciplines his son (5). This is a spiritual lesson for us, as the bread problem is serious to most of us today. We know that we have to work hard to make a living. We often worry about our uncertain future, thinking about our jobs, money, children's education, health, and so on. To live by faith means to believe that God will take care of us, as we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness (Mt 6:33).

Jesus quoted Deuteronomy 8:3 when he was tempted by Satan. Jesus was extremely hungry after fasting for 40 days. But he told Satan: "... man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord." Jesus reminded us that we were created not only as a physical being but also a spiritual being, made in the image of God (Ge 1:27). So we need not only physical bread, but also spiritual food to satisfy our soul. We need to nurture our soul. Of course, we need bread to sustain our body. Jesus told us to pray for our daily bread in the Lord's Prayer. But we need more than bread. We need the word of God. The word of God is the bread of life that gives us eternal life. Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (Jn 6:35). In our lives, we have to make many decisions that often involve the bread problem. We are tempted to make decisions with bread as the primary concern. But we learn here that we should make decisions with the word of God in our hearts. *"Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."*

In verses 7-9, Moses describes how fertile and abundant the Promised Land was. It was "a good land (7) ... a land that will lack nothing (9) ... the good land that he has given you," with brooks, streams, and deep springs out into the valleys and hills, a land that is fertile for producing grains and fruit, a land that is rich with mineral resources such as iron and copper (9). As he described the good land, Moses again warned the Israelites. Look at verses 10-11. *When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. 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.*

To the people of God, time of success is often time of spiritual crisis. In times of need, we tend to plead with God for his help. We struggle to depend on him. But when things go well for us, we often become proud because of our sinful nature. Moses said:

“When you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds grow large and your silver and gold increase, 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” (12-14). Then he added in verse 17: *You may say to yourself, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me.”* Like Frank Sinatra sang in his popular song, *I did it my way*, we may boast: “... I planned each charted course; Each careful step along the byway, And more, much more than this, I did it my way.” Many prominent people say this in their autobiographies, bragging about their accomplishments. But God’s people must not do this. Why not? Moses declares in verse 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 ancestors, as it is today.”* All our ability comes from God (18). We cannot accomplish anything unless God enables it. Think about it. You cannot make any money unless God keep you healthy. Therefore, God’s people must praise and thank God, knowing that every blessing is from him. They must humbly obey his laws and follow his word to the end. Otherwise, he will remove his hand of love and protection and they will be destroyed (19).

In today’s passage, we learned that God chose us in his grace to be a holy nation people. We must not conform to the sinful culture of our society. Instead, we should obey the word of God faithfully as we journey toward the Promised Land. We all have the bread problem. To live by faith means to believe that God provides everything we need as we seek first his kingdom and his righteousness. *“Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”* Amen!