

The Test from the Inside: Need and Plenty  
Deuteronomy 8

Will you turn to Deuteronomy 8 please? In this chapter Moses talks about the test of faith that comes from the inside, from their own situation about food and clothing and shelter.

The questions are: what happens between God and us when we don't have enough? And, what happens between God and us when we have all we need?

Deuteronomy 7 was about the faith test from the outside, from the people who do not follow our God. Those people, and their gods, will turn us away from our God. So be careful, and stay separate from them. In the NT, 2 Corinthians warns us about the same danger. That's the test from the outside.

The test from the inside has to do with our material possessions, or our lack of them. That's what we'll talk about today.

Deut 8:1 – Obey to Enter and Possess - *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.*

Deut 4:1 said almost exactly the same thing, and one way or another this comes up in most of these chapters in Deuteronomy. God had promised to give things to his people. How do we enter into what he's giving, and possess it? A steady life of worshipping God and obeying him.

For Israel, the land itself was their inheritance. Our inheritance is different. Hebrews says we are foreigners and strangers on earth, waiting for a better country, a heavenly one (Heb 11:13, 16). 1 Peter 1 says that our inheritance is kept by God where it can never perish, spoil, or fade.

God is giving this to us. How do we enter and possess what God gives? Trust him only, have no other gods, and obey him. **Whatever** God has to give us, and he gives many things in this life as well as the next, in a sense we have to go get it.

We have to enter into it, and possess it. The way we do this is always the same. Worship and serve the one true God, him only, and live in his ways.

*Be careful to follow every command I am giving you today.* Words like “follow every command” make us wilt insides. It sounds like a call to be perfect, and we cannot give that to God. “Perfect” is not ours to give. If that's what it takes, we will never enter and possess.

But “perfect” is not what Moses means, and we can tell that from Deuteronomy 8 itself, and the other chapters around, by how Moses describes DISobedience. Is disobedience obeying most commands but not all of them? No. Is disobedience obeying imperfectly? No.

Deut 8:11 tells us what failure looks like: forgetting the Lord and not observing his commands and decrees. Deut 8:19 also tells us what failure is: forgetting the LORD your God and following other gods and worshipping them.

It is like the Sermon on the Mount, the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 5-7. There are only two ways, a wide gate that goes to destruction, and a narrow gate that goes to life. And part of the Sermon on the Mount is the Lord's Prayer, which assumes that every day we need to ask our Father to forgive us our sins.

In Deuteronomy, as in Matthew, there are people who aim their lives toward God, and there are those who know they are not. Neither Deuteronomy nor Matthew are calling us to perfection. They ARE calling us to deep and total choice. Follow the LORD's commands, so you may live, and enter into what he gives you, and possess it.

#### Deut 8:2-5, 15-16 – Remember the Lean Times

*<sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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. <sup>4</sup> Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years. <sup>5</sup> Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you.*

*(V15) He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. <sup>16</sup> He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you.*

In the first 10 to 15 years of our marriage, I often worried about money. Regular bills had to be paid, and there were surprise bills to fix different kinds of household collapse, or car troubles. I looked at what we needed to pay, and the money coming in, and I could not see a way through.

We tried to live carefully, and we kept giving back to the Lord in the offering. How can I ask God to bless my finances if I will not honour him with my finances? If God was not real enough to take care of me while I gave money back to him, I wanted to find that out as soon as possible.

During those years there were several times every year when it was bad enough to make my heart sink. But somehow, in two or three months the crisis was over, and most of the time I could not remember how that had happened. God was faithful.

These verses I read tell us how to understand those times. The question at the start was: what happens between God and us when we don't have enough? These words of Moses describe what God was doing during the forty years of punishment for Israel's sin.

- V2 He LED you all the way  
to HUMBLE you  
and TEST you  
to KNOW you, if you would OBEY him
- V3 he caused you to HUNGER  
then FED you with MANNA  
to TEACH you  
that HIS WORDS feed you – when he speaks, you eat
- V4 your CLOTHES lasted  
and your FEET lasted
- V5 the LORD DISCIPLINES you as a father his children
- V15 he LED you through a vast and dreadful wilderness  
a thirsty waterless land with snakes and scorpions  
he brought you WATER out of HARD ROCK
- V16 he gave you MANNA  
to HUMBLE you  
and TEST you  
so that in the END  
it would go WELL with you.

This is what the lean times mean. God humbles us and causes us to hunger, but he is also leading and providing in all kinds of ways we do not see. Do not decide, in the lean times, that God has left you and now you're on your own. This is what the lean times mean. It is a test. If we decide we're on our own, that God left us, we have failed the test.

V 5 said the LORD disciplines you as father his son. Here is an oversimplification: Mothers want to comfort their children, and fathers want their children to survive in the world. Both come from real love and care for the child, but they do different things. It is one reason fathers are harder on their children.

Our God does both in different places in the Bible; he is certainly a God of comfort. But here in v5 he's a dad leading his child through hard things, carefully taking his child through a strenuous experience, so the child will learn to survive in the dangerous world. And the world is dangerous to faith and obedience, and that's the world that God wanted Israel to survive in.

There is a great story in Numbers 11 about God providing, a story not even Moses could believe. All Israel grumbled, we're tired of manna, we wish we were back in Egypt, there was great food there, wasn't it great back in Egypt? Moses, give us MEAT.

Moses to God: where will I get meat for all these people?

God to Moses: tell the people, the LORD will give you meat, you'll eat it for a whole month, until it comes out your nostrils and you loathe it.

Moses to God: You will give them meat for a month? Where are you going to get that?

God to Moses: IS MY ARM TOO SHORT? You will see whether or not I give them meat.

And God caused a wind, a countless quail, and it all happened. God can provide anything, anywhere.

I am going to summarize those verses again. Maybe you've never been in a lean time, maybe you have been in the past, maybe you are in it right now. In any case, listen to this as God speaking to YOU about YOUR times when there is not enough.

- V2 He LED you all the way  
to HUMBLE you  
and TEST you  
to KNOW you, if you would OBEY him
- V3 he caused you to HUNGER  
then FED you with MANNA  
to TEACH you  
that HIS WORDS feed you – when he speaks, you eat
- V4 your CLOTHES lasted  
and your FEET lasted
- V5 the LORD DISCIPLINES you as a father his children
- V15 he LED you through a vast and dreadful wilderness  
a thirsty waterless land with snakes and scorpions  
he brought you WATER out of HARD ROCK
- V16 he gave you MANNA  
to HUMBLE you  
and TEST you  
so that in the END  
it would go WELL with you!

That's what's happening in the lean times, the hard times. It is a most encouraging view.

#### What God will Do – Deut 8:6-9

<sup>6</sup> *Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.*

<sup>7</sup> *For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; <sup>8</sup> a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; <sup>9</sup> 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.*

God was about to lead Israel from hard place into an easy place, lots of everything they need.

#### The Right Response: Praise the LORD your God – Deut 8:10

*When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you.*

In this verse it sounds like we should give thanks for the food AFTER we eat. Jesus always prayed before he ate, which is why we do that, and I doubt it matters very much if it is before or after. But eating is always a God thing. In the Lord's Prayer, every day we ASK God for food.

Moses lets us hungry people eat what God gave, and after, when we are satisfied, then we praise the Lord. The right response is to praise God for food, once we've eaten and are satisfied.

Then Moses gives the wrong response. He's not trying to start a new rule, that we need to sing praise to God after every meal. We learn that from the wrong response. Let's read.

*<sup>11</sup> 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. <sup>12</sup> Otherwise, **when you eat and are satisfied**, when you build fine houses and settle down, <sup>13</sup> and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increase and all you have is multiplied, <sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> He led you through the vast and dreadful wilderness, that thirsty and waterless land, with its venomous snakes and scorpions. He brought you water out of hard rock. <sup>16</sup> He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known, to humble and test you so that in the end it might go well with you. <sup>17</sup> You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." <sup>18</sup> 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.*

*<sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Like the nations the LORD destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the LORD your God.*

So we have two basic choices. When we eat and are satisfied, we remember God which means we praise God (v10). OR, when we eat and our satisfied, we become proud and forget God and instead praise ourselves, our energy and the strength of our hands (vv12,14,17).

We live in a place where we never worry about food or clothing or shelter. God provides them for us every day. And what do you think – are we praising God for this?

Let's think about this. People do need to work to eat. In Genesis 3 God told Adam, "*through painful toil you will eat food from the ground all the days of your life; by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.*"

Hard work and food go together, unfortunately. In 2 Thessalonians Paul says to the church there: *when we were with you we gave you this rule: if a man will not work, he shall not eat* (3:10).

It takes effort to eat. Pain. Work. Toil. Sweat. Those are God's words. So those who work like this feel justified in taking credit, in saying our own energy and strength produced this.

But consider: there are people that will NEVER feed themselves no matter how hard they try. The young, and the old, and many others, are simply unable. And you are able! Because you are better than those who are not able? No, you are not better. Your ability comes from God, your energy comes from God. You did not always have it, and it will not last. It is a gift for a time.

And you might say, “I worked hard, and got ahead, and that person is lazy and that’s why they don’t get anywhere and never have enough.” And you are right. BUT, STILL, all your drive, all your energy, your intelligence, your skills, and endurance, all come from God.

God supplies it one day at a time. The day he stops supplying these things, that very day you will not be able to rouse one speck of it in yourself.

So, when we have eaten and are satisfied, let’s praise the LORD our God. You and I are just as dependent on him now as when we were in the vast and dreadful wilderness, getting manna from heaven and water from hard rock. That is exactly what we forget.

THEN, we knew we depended on him, and now that we have ten times as much, we think WE do it on our own. How did we ever get so foolish? We do not praise the LORD our God.

When all we’ve known is plenty, it is hard to work up a feeling of gratitude. Doesn’t matter what we feel like. We must thank and praise God for our plenty. We must give God credit, for our own good. If this is a crucial test of faith, and the Bible says it is, we’re not doing very well.

Back to Jesus, and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7: in the middle of that Sermon, Jesus had a long section about God our provider, about our Father in heaven who feeds birds, and clothes flowers, and where do we think we get our food and our clothes, and not worrying about these things. Jesus, like Moses, thought this was one of the basics that every child of God needs to get straight.

When you eat and are satisfied, praise God, says Moses. Tell God that you have lots, and that you got it all from him. Can you feel how deeply this goes against our culture? In our culture we NEVER have enough. We deserve more, we’re told, so go buy something. That’ll work for a short time, then we’re dissatisfied, so go buy something again.

And success is being able to keep doing just this: buying a few days or weeks of contentment at a time. But Moses says: praise God because you have all you need, and you got it all from HIM. If we don’t praise God this way, we are forgetting God and sliding into idolatry.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, thank you for providing. We have food and clothing and shelter, and it all comes from you. We have forgotten to praise you and thank you. We work hard, and we think that is how these things come. We rarely worry about food and clothing and shelter, even though it is your goodness to us, one day at a time. You taught us to ask you for food, one day at a time, and we rarely ask, because you have been so steady and generous. And though we forget, and we do not praise you, you still supply all these day after day. By not praising you, Father, we have begun to forget you. The very thing Moses warned us not to do, we have done. Lead us back to praising you. You made sure Israel’s clothes lasted forty years. You gave them water from hard rock, and manna from heaven. Our clothes are just as much from you as theirs were, our water and our food are just as much from you as theirs were. We give you all the honour and credit for these things. We give you all the honour and credit for the strength to work. It is all from you. Your kindness is great, every single day.