

## REMEMBERING THE PAST

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

**Intro:** We come this today to the last Sunday of the year 2002. It seems just like yesterday when the whole world was wondering what it would do to our computers to move into the twenty-first century, and now we are almost in 2003.

God is the One Who determined that man's existence on the earth would be measured in terms of years. We read that on the fourth day of creation God said this:

14 . . . Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:

15 And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

16 And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also (Gen. 1:14-16).

The word "year" or its plural "years," is found over 900 times in the Old and New Testaments. So it is a word of great importance in the Word of God.

In Genesis 5 where we have the first genealogy of Scripture, we are told how many years Adam lived, and the how many years Seth lived, and on down to how many years Lamech lived who was the father of Noah. So time is measured in terms of days, months, and years. When the Lord brought the children of Israel out of Egypt, He told Moses and Aaron,

2 This month shall be unto you the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you (Ex. 12:2).

Years mark the passing of time for all of us. They marked the passing of time for everyone who is mentioned in the Bible. God has set time limits on the wickedness of man. For those of us who know the Lord, years measure our spiritual growth whether it is good or bad. Time is very, very precious. Time wasted can never be retrieved. And so we must be careful to obey what the Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, exhorted the Ephesian and Colossian believers to do:

15 See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

16 Redeeming the time, because the days are evil (Eph. 5:15-16).

To the Colossian believers he wrote,

5 Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

To redeem our time means that we are making the most of it, putting it to the best use. The idea is that we should use our time in the best possible way for our own spiritual benefit as well as for the spiritual good of others.

While we all are aware that we could have spent much of our time this past year in more profitable ways, yet I trust that as we look back over 2002 we can thank the Lord that we have learned more of Him, that we have come to love Him more, and that we can praise Him if He has used us to be a blessing to others.

Perhaps we are more acutely aware of our failures than we are of any progress that we have made. That in itself can be a blessing. The Lord lets us remember our failures so that we won't repeat them. Our failures indicate areas of our lives where we need to be more careful, and more prayerful, and more conscious of how much more we need to trust the Lord where we have been failing Him.

Even though today we have just concluded the study of the whole book of Deuteronomy, I want to take you back to that book to look again at two verses in the eighth chapter – verses 2 and 3. There Moses, in the second of three messages he gave to the whole nation the month prior to his death, He called upon them *to remember*. But he was not asking them to remember just the previous year. He was asking them to remember the previous *forty years!* That was from the time that they had left Egypt until they had reached the Jordan River and were ready to go into the land that God had promised to give them.

As they looked back, they had many reasons to regret that they had done – the times they had murmured against the Lord, and the times that their murmurings had turned to outright rebellion. I hope they regretted their idolatry, especially the worship of the golden calf which Aaron had made for them. They repeatedly had given Moses a bad time, and had even wished that they were back in Egypt again as slaves. It was only by the grace of God that they were where they were. A whole generation of their fathers had died because they had refused to go into the promised land.

So, as they thought about what they had done during those forty years, there was not much that they could have been proud of. Those forty years

would have been totally wasted years IF, IF, it had not been for the Lord. So they could not have remembered how they had failed the Lord time and time again without remembering also how totally faithful God had been to them.

We have never been in circumstances like the children of Israel experienced in their journey from Egypt to Canaan, but there certainly are parallels between the Lord's dealings with them in those days and His dealings with us each day of our lives. This is what makes even the OT very practical for all of us who know the Lord. And so I want to point out from Deuteronomy 8 what Moses wanted the children of Israel to remember about the past in order that they might be better prepared, and more understanding of His dealings with them in the future. And these two verses can mean the same to us.

The first point coming to us from verse 2 is this:

**I. ALL THE WAY THE LORD WAS LEADING THEM (Deut. 8:2a).**

As I have mentioned to many of you several times before, as Dr. Chafer would begin his classes in theology, he would lead us in singing just one verse of a hymn, and the chorus is there was one. And one we sang together frequently was,

He leadeth me, O blessed thought!  
O words with heav'nly comfort fraught!  
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,  
Still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

“Words with heavenly comfort fraught” means that the word, “He leadeth me,” are *loaded with heavenly comfort*. And they are if you stop to think about it for a moment. We know that this is true because it is taught in the Word.

King David loved this truth. He referred to it twice in Psalm 23. He said, “He leadeth me beside the still waters,” and then in the next verse he said, “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake.” The prophet Isaiah said,

11 And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not (Isa. 58:11).

The Lord Jesus said as He spoke of Himself as a Shepherd, and of His people as sheep,

3 . . . and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.

4 And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice (John 10:3b-4).

The Lord led His people through the desert with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. When the cloud moved, the people moved; and when the cloud stopped, the people stopped. And we are even told why the Lord did not lead them by the shortest route to Canaan. Listen to what we read in Ex. 13:17-18a

17 And it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt:

18 But God led the people about, through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea . . .

Now the same is true for us. He is always leading us. We don't have a cloud to follow, but the Lord leads us nevertheless. He is always leading us. As the Good Shepherd He never leaves us to make our own way. The question is not, will He lead us, but, will we follow Him? Many times we don't know what to do. That means that for us the cloud has stopped, and so we had better wait until God makes His will clear to us. George Mueller used to quote Psa. 37:23 which says, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord," and then he would add, "And the stops are too."

How blessed we are as the people of God! The people of the world do not have a Shepherd like we do. Sometimes the children of Israel wanted to break away and go back to Egypt, but the Lord continued to lead, and He kept them following even when they didn't want to. All of us have made our share of mistakes when we have failed to wait on the Lord, and to trust Him, but can you imagine what would have happened to us if the Lord had not been leading us, and keeping us, and caring for us? As you read through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, a forty year journey, the Lord was leading them every day of those forty years, and every mile that they traveled.

But now let me move on to another point.

I think we all know that too often we are concerned about where we

should be, and what we are to do, but in His leading of our lives,

## **II. THE LORD'S PRIMARY CONCERN IS IN WHAT WE ARE.**

I don't mean by this that the Lord is not concerned about where we are. He is greatly concerned. But that is not His greatest concern. His greatest concern is what is going on in our lives. Do we really understand this? Look at what Moses went on to say in verse 2 of our text. God led them as He did,

### **A. To humble them (Deut. 8:2).**

What does this tell you about the hearts of the children of Israel? What was their greatest problem? It wasn't what they were going to eat. The Lord took care of that. Nor was it what they were going to drink. The Lord took care of that too. It wasn't their enemies who might attack them along the way. The Lord took care of that. What was their greatest problem? It was PRIDE! It is in all of us. The Lord worked on their pride for forty years, and it was still their major problem. Solomon said many wise things which the Lord had taught him, but one of the most important is that which is recorded for us in Prov. 16:18, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." It is our pride that keeps us from trusting the Lord as we should. It is our pride that makes us feel that we can do very well on our own. We want to be able to go to the Lord when we are overwhelmed by some problem. We don't realize that we can be overwhelmed by *any* problem!

That is why the Lord started them out by leading them right up to the shores of the Red Sea. This is why He didn't give them a month's supply of food all at once. This is why He supplied water for them in many different ways.

And this is why the Israelites so quickly become impatient and rebellious against the Lord. Their pride was their problem. This is why you read so little (in fact, practically nothing) about the prayers of the Israelites. They were so proud they didn't know how much they needed to pray.

And can't we see in our lives how often our pride has gotten us into trouble? Paul taught from his Roman confinement that the Philippians were to have the mind of Christ. How did he describe it? Listen to Paul's words:

5 Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God:

7 But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

8 And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:5-8).

The verb *to humble* means *to bring a person down*. The Apostle Paul expressed it this way: “For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself” (Gal. 6:3). There never has been a person who has lived on the earth who has not been plagued with pride – except for our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there was a second reason for the way the Lord led His people, and why He leads us as He does:

### **B. “To prove thee” (Deut. 8:2).**

What does this mean? God never tempts us to sin, but He does test us our faith. Why? So He will find out what is in our hearts. Never! We have an omniscient God Who knows every detail of everything. We cannot hide anything from Him. No, it is not that He will know, but that we will know what is in our hearts. David learned this by two tragic mistakes that he made. And Peter found out how weak he was when young women accused him of being a disciple of the Lord. The proof of the reality of our relationship with the Lord is not in what we say unless it is backed up by the way we perform. And it is most humbling and humiliating when the Lord begins to show us what is really in our hearts. Jeremiah was telling the truth when he wrote these words from the Lord:

9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

10 I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings (Jer. 17:9-10).

But there is one more thing that the Lord wanted them to remember from their past experiences:

### **C. He led them as He did to see if they would keep His com-**

**mandments (Deut. 8:2b).**

What did the children of Israel find out? Even though they had said that they would do whatever the Lord wanted them to do, they didn't do it!

Here is a test you and I can give to ourselves. How important is your Bible reading to you? Is it easy for you to skip a day, or two days, or a week, or longer? And how important is it to you to pray as you read that you will both understand what you read, and that you will be given the strength to obey the Word of God?

If we are not obeying the Word of God, it is because we are proud. And if we truly know the Lord, He is going to "prove us" so that we will see as we fail the test, how weak and proud we really are.

**Concl:** So what did the Lord do? Read verse 3. He humbled them. He proved them by letting them go without food for a time. And then He fed them in a way that none of their fathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Judah) had known. And this disciplining was all for the purpose of showing that manna was not the main food that they needed. They needed to be feeding their souls on the Word of God.

The Lord wanted them to remember "all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness." The words, "the way," do not just mean the pathway that the Lord led them, but the manner in which He led them and provided for them through all of those forty years. Read the rest of the chapter and you will see what God was seeking to do in the hearts of His people during those forty years. They were not just marking time; God was mightily at work both for them and in them.

As we think back over 2002, what kind of a year has it been spiritually for us? What has the Lord been doing in our lives which we need to remember if 2003 is to be a better year? I can't answer those questions for you, and you can't answer them for me, but we all need to answer them for ourselves, and to do it before the Lord.