

Deuteronomy 8:2-6

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Moses calls Israel to reflect on and carry lessons learned from the discipline and training they received in the wilderness experience in order to walk in God's ways and to fear Him.

Having asked the Israelites to keep the entire commandment of God in order to live and multiply, enter and possess the land (v. 1), Moses now gives the method that would allow them to do so. He began by saying, *You shall remember all the way which the LORD your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years.* The wilderness journey was a difficult one for the Israelites. The wilderness was a *great and terrible* land full of *fiery serpents and scorpions* (vv. 15-16). Israel needed to *remember all the way which the LORD had led* them in order to recall His faithfulness, and the lessons they had learned along the way.

The Suzerain God *led* His people through this difficult journey for their learning. Their training. He protected His people all the way through the wilderness to lead them to the Promised Land. But He had a specific purpose to train and prepare them. Thus, remembering *all the way of the wilderness* would serve as the foundation for obedience to *all the way* which the LORD commands in the land of Canaan ([Deuteronomy 5:33](#)). It was now time for them to apply the lessons they had learned in the wilderness to go in and possess their possession, and receive their inheritance.

God's purpose in leading the Israelites *in the wilderness these forty years* was *so that He might humble* them, *testing* them. The verb translated *humble* means "to afflict." God deliberately brought the Israelites difficult circumstances so they might learn. God tested them like a professor tests their students, or a coach tests their players, to prove them and ensure their readiness. After their escape from Egyptian servitude, the Israelites wandered in the wilderness of Sinai for *forty years*. During that time, they experienced hunger because they were in a hostile land, and were not able to carry enough bread with them for the journey. But the LORD miraculously provided for them ([Exodus 16](#)). Thus, Moses asked the Israelites to remember their history in order not to repeat it. Israel must remember their affliction and testing in the wilderness in order to trust and obey the LORD in the land of Canaan.

The purpose of God afflicting and testing the Israelites was *to know what was in their heart, whether they would keep His commandments or not*. One of Israel's tests came in the form of hunger. God afflicted His people by allowing them to experience hunger; then He fed them with manna, a previously unknown food coming directly from heaven ([Exodus 16:4](#)). As Moses declared, "*He [God] humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna.*"

The word "manna" derives from the Hebrew phrase *man hu'* which means "what is it?" ([Exodus 16:15](#)). This was the question the Israelites asked Moses when they first saw the food God provided for them, "a fine flake-like thing, fine as the frost on the ground" ([Exodus 16:14](#)). This manna, *which Israel did not know, nor did their fathers know*, was created especially for the Israelites during their hardship in the wilderness, when they no longer had any bread ([Joshua 5:12](#)). Thus, the hardship experience was brought about by the Suzerain (Ruler) God to *make His vassals (Israel) understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD*.

That which *proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD* is always life-sustaining. Daily bread/food is not enough to fully sustain life. Jesus quoted this verse when Satan tempted Him to turn stones into bread in order to satisfy his physical hunger. Jesus answered all three temptations by quoting from Deuteronomy. To the first temptation, Jesus answered, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" ([Matthew 4:4](#)). While the body needs bread/food to sustain physical life, the soul needs the word of God (as bread/food) to sustain the spiritual life and to keep man's focus on God.

God's provision of manna to sustain their physical bodies carried a spiritual lesson, that the people were not able to lean on their own abilities to sustain life. Humans often have an illusion that we control our ability to care for our needs. That we are self-sufficient. So sometimes God teaches us the reality of our dependence by removing this illusion through difficult circumstances.

God let Israel *be hungry*, then provided miraculously by feeding them *with manna*, which was something completely outside their experience. Something *they did not know, nor did their fathers know*. The Suzerain (Ruler) God is dependable and generous; He is the only one who provides both physical (manna) and spiritual bread (His word) to feed His people. God provided this experiential lesson so *He might make them understand the*

important principle of dependence. Dependence upon *everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD*.

God's provision for Israel in the wilderness included more than just *manna*. God also provided clothes for His people and supernaturally protected these clothes from decay. Moses stated, *Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years*. While testing and training His vassals, the Suzerain (Ruler) God fully provided their basic needs. He did so one day at a time, consistent with the Lord's Prayer, which instructs us to pray for daily bread.

He provided clothes for them that lasted against wear and tear. One day at a time. God kept their feet from swelling, meaning their sandals did not break. They did not lack for basic necessities. But they were trained to depend upon God daily. It was thus necessary for Israel to go through that learning experience so that they would know how to trust God and possess the inheritance they had already been granted by possessing the Promised Land. But in case Israel did not understand God's purpose in humbling them, Moses made it clear to them, saying, *Thus you are to know in your heart that the LORD your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son*.

The word "discipline" speaks of a learning experience in which attentive nurture or care is provided to create needed learning. God is not only a perfect Suzerain or ruler, God is also a perfect parent. Moses said that the LORD disciplines Israel, *just as a man disciplines his son*. A good father trains his son to go into the world and be successful. In order to equip him, the father ensures the son goes through difficulties while under his protection, that he might be equipped to endure greater difficulties when he is on his own. He takes into account the limited resources his son possesses.

As a parent, the human father thus seeks to improve his child's wisdom, resources and knowledge by training him in the ways he should go ([Proverbs 22:6](#)). In the same way, God allowed Israel to go through a learning process in order to give positive moral lessons to them. Discipline is never fun. But it is invaluable. The excellent coach disciplines their team so they will rise to the challenge at the end of the game. God disciplines Israel so they can gain the skills needed to trust Him and possess the land in a manner that brings them blessing. This training would allow Israel to be loyal to their Suzerain God by keeping His statutes.

The Israelites were to reflect on their past in order to better live in the present. In light of all these lessons, Moses exhorted the people, *Therefore, you shall*

keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. This is the bottom line lesson, which is why Moses says *Therefore.* Given all that they have learned, and all God has taught them, the great lesson they should have taken is that their best interest lies in obedience. In keeping *the commands of the LORD their God. To walk in His ways* included all the very practical ways God instructed them so their lives and communities would thrive. Caring for one another. Dealing honestly. Respecting the property of others, and avoiding envy.

The command to walk in God's ways means to please God. To fear God is to care what God thinks and whether He approves of our behavior. To greatly desire keeping their agreement with God and avoid discipline for disobedience. The Israelites were tested and humbled to learn how to please their covenant partner, Yahweh. In doing so, God led them to seek what was in their true best interest.

Biblical Text:

You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord. ⁴Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. ⁵Thus you are to know in your heart that the Lord your God was disciplining you just as a man disciplines his son. ⁶Therefore, you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him.