

The book of Deuteronomy begins by saying, *“These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the wilderness east of the Jordan...In the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the LORD had commanded him concerning them”* (1:1, 3). Moses the mediator is the spokesperson, but he speaks only what God has given him to speak.

In the first four chapters, Moses recounts Israel’s history with The LORD. In chapter 5, he recites the Ten Commandments, along with the circumstances in which Moses received the commandments and, in turn, gave them to the Israelites. In chapter 6, he recounts the greatest commandment: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength”* (6:4-5).

In chapter 7, Moses begins to prepare the Israelites for the day when they will enter the Promised Land. He reminds them that they are God’s chosen people and warns them not to intermingle or intermarry with the people who currently occupy the Promised Land. He also reminds them that they are a covenant people (7:12) and promises blessings and prosperity if they will keep the commandments that the LORD has given them.

Chapter 8 begins with a call to keep the commandments and to remember their history—a history in which God humbled Israel in the wilderness—and a history in which he fed the Israelites manna and kept their clothing from wearing out. He says in verse 6, *“Observe the commands of the LORD your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him.”*

Then in verse 14 we read, *“And you will forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.”* You WILL forget the Lord your God! Not you MIGHT, or you COULD, but You WILL. For the Israelites, the greatest temptation of prosperity is that they will become focused on material things and forget the LORD, who made their prosperity possible.

They will be tempted to forget centuries of slavery in Egypt—and their miraculous deliverance in the Exodus. They will be tempted to forget the plagues that caused such suffering in Egypt that Pharaoh finally allowed them to leave. They will be tempted to forget that, when they were trapped between the waters of the Red Sea at their front and the Egyptian chariots at their back, Yahweh saved them. They will be tempted to forget

that, at Yahweh's command, Moses stretched out his staff over the sea and divided it so that the Israelites might pass through the sea on dry ground. They will be tempted to forget that, once they had passed through the sea, at Yahweh's command, Moses stretched out his hand over the sea so that the waters returned to their natural state, drowning the Egyptian army. They will be tempted to forget, not only their history with the LORD, but the LORD himself.

*"Then your heart will become proud and you will forget the LORD your God,"* says verse 14. The epitome of forgetfulness would be for the Israelites to remember their own victories—and then forget Yahweh's part in those victories. They will be tempted to remember their military exploits—and the work they did to subdue the land—and then forget the hand of God that brought about their success. When that happens, they will begin to believe that they are a nation of giants, rather than a nation led by a wondrous God. Then they will be poised to take a fall, because God will need to discipline them once again to bring them back to their spiritual senses.

In verse 15 we read, *"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."* So that's where the "Hard Rock Café" got its name! 😊 Once settled in their good land—the land into which Yahweh is leading them—Israel will dwell in fine houses amidst many possessions, and their memories of the wilderness will quickly fade. In their comfort, they will be tempted to forget their uncomfortable years. They will be tempted to forget the poisonous snakes and their ever-pressing need for water. They will be tempted to forget that Yahweh provided water from a rock.

An aging couple are both having problems remembering things. So during a check-up, the doctor tells them that they're physically okay, but they might want to start writing things down to help them remember. Later that night, while watching TV, the man gets up from his chair. "Want anything while I'm in the kitchen?" he asks. "Will you get me a bowl of ice cream?" "Sure." "Don't you think you should write it down so you can remember it?" she asks. "No, I can remember it."

"Well, I'd like some strawberries on top, too. Maybe you should write it down, so as not to forget it?" He says, "I can remember that. You want a bowl of ice cream with strawberries." "I'd also like whipped cream. I'm certain you'll forget that, so write it down," she asks. Irritated, he says, "I don't need to write it down, I can remember it! Ice cream with strawberries and whipped cream. I got it, for goodness sake!"

He goes to the kitchen. After about 20 minutes, the man returns from the kitchen and hands his wife a plate of bacon and eggs. She stares at the plate for a moment and says, “Where’s my toast?”

Speaking of toast, “*He gave you manna to eat in the wilderness, something your ancestors had never known*” (v. 16a). When their storehouses are overflowing with wheat and barley (v. 8), they will be tempted to forget the time when they had none. They will be tempted to forget the manna with which Yahweh fed their ancestors. Once they have bread to spare, they will be tempted to forget that Yahweh made it possible for the Israelites to gather their daily bread in the manna-fields, but that Yahweh also made it impossible for them to gather tomorrow’s bread, unless tomorrow happened to be the Sabbath.

In his book, *Moses: In the Footsteps of the Reluctant Prophet*, Adam Hamilton says, “Deuteronomy is set in the final days of Moses’ life. He had led the Israelites to the Jordan River, just east of the Promised Land. God told Moses that he would not actually enter the land with them; shortly he would ascend Mount Nebo, and there he would die... It is clear in reading Deuteronomy that Moses was worried that following his death, the people might *forget* who they were, whose they were, and why God had brought them to this land. In his final messages, Moses summarizes the journey they’ve been on together. He recites the most important parts of the Law. He reminds the Israelites of their calling and mission as God’s people. And he urges them to pass on their faith to their children...”

Moses’ heart was heavy that day, not because his death was imminent but because he feared that the Israelites would enter the land, become prosperous, and *forget* what God had done for them. He worried that they would slowly drift away from God and that the mission for which God had delivered them—to be a kingdom of priests making God known to the world—would be all but forgotten. Fifteen times in Deuteronomy he tells the Israelites to remember—not to forget. You can hear his concern clearly in chapter 8...

Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann wrote in his book *Spirituality of the Psalms* about the seasons of life that Israel seemed to cycle through regularly, seasons that we recognize in our own lives. He described these seasons as Orientation, Disorientation, and Reorientation. Orientation is when things are going well—so well, in fact, that over time it’s easy to forget God. In this season we experience the words to the old hymn: “*Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.*” Disorientation is when we do wander from God and feel fear, anxiety, and pain (like during an Election year or a Pandemic—or both). When Israel wandered from God she made poor choices, uninformed

by her faith. God's hand of protection was no longer with her. The nation would find itself in trouble, and enemies would gain the upper hand. In this season Israel would cry out to God, asking for help and forgiveness.

God, who is rich in mercy, would rescue Israel, healing, forgiving, and restoring her. This season Brueggemann refers to as Reorientation. In these moments after receiving forgiveness and restoration we experience ecstatic joy and feelings of gratitude and hope. Over time, however, Reorientation gives way to Orientation, which can lead to straying and Disorientation all over again. In a sense Israel's story, and our story, can be told in the light of this ever-repeating cycle. The Exodus story has already seen these cycles...We can see the timelessness of Deuteronomy when we recognize that it's not just Israel's story; it's our story. We're all "*prone to wander...prone to leave the God I love.*" (Hamilton, Adam. *Moses* p. 164. Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition)

Throughout the story of Moses and the Israelites, whether in times of prosperity or hardship, we have clearly seen that maintaining a relationship with God begins and ends with one simple central thought: Remember the Lord! Amen.