

Deut 8:1–20 The Perils of Prosperity

In American culture, pride is a virtue. We live in the “land of the free and the home of the brave.” We have a history of independence; we celebrate Independence Day every year. We value self-determination and independent thinking. America is the land of the self-made man. And that spirit of independence leads to pride. Americans believe that they live in the greatest country; we have many reasons to be proud. “I’m proud to be an American...”

To some degree, independence and self-sufficiency are virtues. We want to be able to cope with our world without becoming dependent on others. We want to be able to overcome the obstacles in our lives and succeed based on our own hard work and initiative. If we succeed, we want to enjoy the fruits of our labors.

However, spiritually speaking, we dare not become independent or proud. We must maintain our humble dependence on the Lord. We must not be self-sufficient spiritually. We must find our sufficiency in Christ. We are totally dependent on God, and it’s best for us to remember that we rely on God for everything.

In Deut 8, Moses is exhorting the Israelites to maintain their dependence on God and not become proud or self-sufficient. Moses exhorts his people to obey the Lord, remember what God has done, and avoid idolatry. If they depend on the Lord, he will bring them into the PL and provide everything they need. If they fail to do so, destruction awaits. They must remember that the Lord is the source of all blessing, both past and future.¹

You’ll notice that Moses exhorts the people repeatedly to remember and to not forget—he says it about five times — .2, 11, 14, 18, 19.

Quote: There is ... a twofold message in chapter 8: (1) remember God in the hard times of the past; (2) do not forget God in the good times in the future (Wright 1996: 121).²

¹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 185.

² Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 150.

To remember the Lord is to obey his commandments. To forget the Lord amounts to disobedience, disloyalty, and eventually idolatry. When we remember the Lord, we rely upon him; we remain dependent. When we forget the Lord, we rely upon ourselves; we are independent and proud. The choice is ultimately between pride and humility, between crediting oneself or crediting God.

Like the ancient Israelites, we too must remain dependent on God. We must remember his commandments and remember how he has blessed us in the past. Active reliance on God will help us avoid pride and self-sufficiency. And remembering the Lord and relying upon him will help us avoid chastisement and potential destruction.

How do we avoid pride and maintain a humble dependence on God?

I. .1, 6 Obey “every commandment” that God has given.

.6 keep the commandments, walk in his ways, fear him.

If they want to enjoy life in the PL—“live, multiply, go in, possess the land”—they must obey God.

Independence is when we say that we don’t need to obey God’s commands; we’ll do whatever we want. Independent people put themselves first.

Dependence is recognizing our obligation to obey God. We affirm that God is our creator and that he has the right to tell us what to do. Dependence is remembering what God has done for us and remaining loyal to him.

II. .2 Remember what God has done in the past.

Moses lists several experiences Israel has had on their journey out of Egypt and into the PL.

A. .2a He led you all the way.

1. God has led them for the past 40 years.

2. God led them through the wilderness with the pillar of cloud and fire.

3. God led them through Moses and the leaders of Israel.

B. .2b He humbled and tested you

1. The humbling part of it was that God allowed Israel to “hunger” (vs. 3a). The people learned that they had to depend on God totally. God supplied the manna miraculously. If the manna supply failed, they would starve.

2. .2b God tested the people in various ways. We find this testing language in Exodus.

Exodus 16:4 *Then the LORD said to Moses, “Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you. And the people shall go out and gather a certain quota every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in My law or not.*

Exodus 20:20 *And Moses said to the people, “Do not fear; for God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you, so that you may not sin.”*

3. .2b So the test was to see what was in your heart and to see if you would keep his commandments or not. These trials served to demonstrate whether they trusted God or not.

App: The difficulties of life humble us and test us as well. Perhaps God is trying to teach us something through the trials of life. What would he be teaching us? To rely on him and not on ourselves.

We should not be surprised if God tests our faith.

1 Peter 1:6–7 *... you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, ... though **it is tested by fire**, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Genuine faith perseveres through the fiery trials of life.

- C. .3 He taught you to live by “every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord” and not by bread alone. This is what Israel should have learned in the wilderness classroom.

1. The God who could miraculously feed them with manna in the wilderness is the God that they should listen to.
2. We need both physical and spiritual food.
3. This again points out our reliance/dependence on God for both kinds of food, both physical and spiritual.
4. Jesus quotes from this passage when Satan tempted him (Mt 4).

App: We ought to hunger and thirst for the words that proceed from the mouth of God. We have that today in the Bible. Just like we need our daily bread, we also need a daily feeding on God’s word.

- D. .4 He provided for all your needs.
- E. .5 He chastened you as a man chastens his son.

1. Israel should “know” this; the humbling and testing was instructive discipline, like a man chastening his son.
2. We typically think of chastening as punishment for sin. But in this case, the purpose for chastening was to teach. The wanderings in the wilderness taught the Israelites to depend on God. The people had to trust the Lord to provide everything for them. This experience was educational for Israel.
3. God was training Israel to rely on him.

Quote: the purpose of this divine [education] was that they keep the commandments of the God who provides for them. To depend upon the LORD means to remember him, which means to obey him, which means to love him.³

App: We should learn the same things from our trials and tribulations. The Lord chastens us to educate us, to train us to rely more fully on him. We need to learn those lessons from the “school of hard knocks.”

Sometimes we need fatherly chastening. We should be glad when that happens, because it’s a mark of genuine salvation. Chastening is an evidence of God’s care and love.

Trans: Remember what God has done in the past.

III. .7-10 Appreciate what God can do in the future.

The people have passed through the wilderness and will soon be entering the PL. Their future looks bright if they remember the Lord.

- A. .7 He can bring you into a good land.
 1. .7 That land contains plenty of brooks and waters; fountains and springs—water is necessary for agriculture.
 2. .8-9a That land contains plenty of food; crops grow well there. It’s a wonderful place for farming.
 3. .9b That land contains plenty of natural resources, including iron and copper. Archaeologists have unearthed evidence of mining and smelting operations there in the ancient world.
- B. .10 He is worthy of blessing/praise for what he has provided.

³ Matt Fuller, *Teaching Deuteronomy: From Text to Message*, Teach the Bible (Ross-shire, Scotland; London: Christian Focus; PT Resources, 2022), 145.

1. When Israel finally settles in the land, they must “bless the Lord” for the “good land which he has given you.” They must remember that God gave them this land.
2. God deserves the credit for providing the land and all these benefits. When they get there, they must be thankful to God for these huge blessings.

App: Likewise, we must bless the Lord for all the good things we enjoy. One of the ways we remember the Lord is that we express our thanks for what he’s done for us. When we are thankful to God for what he provides, we avoid the sins of pride and self-sufficiency.

Don’t forget to be thankful for all the blessings you enjoy.

IV. .11-16 Don’t forget the Lord

Moses begins this section with “Beware.” He’s warning the people not to forget all that God had done for them.

The nation will face various perils and threats when they conquer the land and become prosperous. These perils and threats pertain to prosperity, not poverty. Prosperity can present its own set of perils. Having everything you need can lead to forgetting God. So he’s warning them about the dangers of complacency and self-sufficiency.

For Israel, the wilderness wanderings was a form of testing, but ease and prosperity in the PL would also be a test and temptation for them. Both hardship and prosperity provide the potential for testing and temptation. In both cases, Israel must continue to remember the Lord, obey him, and rely on him.

When they experience the prosperity of vs. 10, they might potentially forget the Lord. They have eaten and are full (שָׂבֵעַ)—“to be satisfied or sated; to have more than enough.” They have everything they need; they are prosperous. It’s during times of prosperity that people are often tempted to forget God.

Am 6:1 *Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, ...*

App: Hard times and poverty often lead us to rely more fully on God. He’s all we have. If he does not provide, we are sunk. But wealth and ease may tempt us to forget God or to neglect God. Prosperity is a blessing, but it has its own set of problems.

Jesus said that it was harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to get into heaven. Affluence/wealth/prosperity can be a temptation and snare for some. Cf. 1 Tim 6:9f.

Moses lists several ways that Israel could potentially forget the Lord:

- A. .11 We forget God by failing to obey his commands, judgments, and statutes. Sometimes prosperous, powerful people think that rules and standards don't apply to them.
- B. .12-13 We forget God by forgetting the source of all these blessings.
 - 1. .12b Plenty to eat, beautiful houses to live in
 - 2. .13 Herds and flocks
 - 3. Silver and gold
 - 4. All that you have is multiplied

Moses envisions a time in the near future when Israel will be prosperous and satisfied in the PL. They'll conquer the land, move in, settle down, multiply, become prosperous—and then forget God. They'll forget their history, forget what God has done for them, forget that everything they have is from God.

Once people forget God, they start focusing on themselves...

- C. .14a We forget God by pride. — “your heart is lifted up”
 - 1. Pride is independence and self-sufficiency. Pride is relying on self instead of relying on God.
 - 2. And to be proud of all these blessings when it was God who provided them is a profound sin. How can people be proud of themselves when everything they have is a gift? That shows the depravity of the human heart. That's the essence of pride—substituting self for God.
 - 3. The Bible consistently describes pride as sin. In our culture, pride is considered to be a virtue; everyone is supposed to have pride. But in the Bible, pride is sin. In fact, pride is a primary sin, a sin that leads to many other sins. One of the signs of forgetting God is exalting yourself.
- D. .14b-16 We forget God by forgetting all the Lord has brought you through.
 - 1. .14b He brought you out of Egypt.

2. .15 He led you through “that great and terrible wilderness.”
3. He brought forth water out of the rock.
4. .16 He fed you with manna.
5. .16end He intended to “do you good in the end.” All of the wilderness experiences had a goal in mind. God accomplished good through the difficulties of the wilderness wandering.

Quote: The Lord was preparing his people to trust him in every way, so that Israel’s final *good* as his covenant people might become a reality in the *good* land.⁴

After God did all of that for Israel, how could they forget God? Only through pride—when “your heart is lifted up” (vs. 14a). Only those who forget God become proud of themselves.

App: The Bible tells us to humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he will lift us up. The Bible values humility, not pride.

- E. .17-18 We forget God by claiming credit for the things God has provided.

The danger here is self-praise and self-sufficiency.

1. .17 Don’t claim that you prospered by your own power and might. Don’t claim credit for the prosperity that God gave you.
 - a) Israel will conquer the PL and acquire great wealth in the process. When they fight these battles and take over these cities, it will be easy for them to congratulate themselves for their own success.
 - b) But of course Israel will conquer only because God gives them the PL. God will fight for them; he will send the “hornets” to dislodge the Canaanites. Israel could never conquer this land without the Lord’s direct intervention. All of this prosperity and success is purely do to the Lord’s blessing.
2. .18b Instead of claiming credit for yourself, acknowledge that God gives you power to prosper.

⁴ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 155.

Moses expects the people to prosper in the PL. It's a stereotype, but it's often true: Jews tend to prosper financially when given the opportunity to do so.

Some people who become prosperous claim credit for their wealth. Prosperous people often neglect the Lord because of their pride. Their heart is lifted up, and they take credit for what God has given them.

App: Because America is, largely, a prosperous land, and because we are mostly prosperous people, these same perils and threats pertain today. It's easy for us to be proud, self-reliant, and self-sufficient. We tend to take credit for our own successes. The danger of pride is that we forget God and what he's done for us.

America has largely forgotten God.

We must be humble and thankful for everything God provides for us.

If we gain power and wealth, we must acknowledge that God is the ultimate source of these blessings. There is nothing inherently wrong with success or prosperity. If God gives you the ability to become wealthy, that's great. Enjoy your wealth, but don't take credit for what God gave you. Be humble before God and recognize that God grants you power to become wealthy.

V. .18c-20 Remember the stipulations of the covenant.

.18c "that he may establish this covenant"

A. .18a The covenant requires that you "remember the Lord your God."

1. Moses repeatedly reminds the people that they still function under the covenant that God made with their fathers—Abe, Isaac, Jacob.
2. Israel is the chosen people of God, which means that they are obligated to obey the covenant.

B. .19 The covenant requires that those who "follow other gods and serve them" would "perish."

Here we have another stern warning/threat about what might happen if the people fall into idolatry.

This chapter begins with a *promise*—vs. 1—live, multiply, go in, possess the land.

The chapter ends with a *threat of peril*—vss. 19-20—if you forget God at the end of this process, you will "perish."

Even if God granted them all the benefits of the PL, he could take it all away if they fell into idolatry. If they did not keep their covenant obligations, God would take it all away.

1. .19b This is true—“I testify against you this day...” This is a solemn oath/promise, a genuine threat.
2. .20 This failure will result in the same treatment as the Canaanites.
 - a) .19end You will “surely perish.”
 - b) .20 You will experience the same fate as the Canaanites.
 - c) .20end Why? Because of disobedience.

Remember that God had determined to exterminate the Canaanites; they were to be utterly destroyed. So the threat/warning is that the same thing could happen to Israel if it violates the terms of the covenant.

Again we see the conditional nature of the covenant. God would bless them extravagantly if they obey God’s commands and remember what God has done for them. If they continue to depend on God and credit their success to him, they will “live and multiply, and go in and possess the land” (vs. 1). They will enjoy immense prosperity and blessing. But if they fall into pagan idolatry, they will suffer extinction, just like those wicked Canaanites.

Quote: Moses stood as the representative of the Lord to swear that Israel’s covenant infidelity would surely result in their total destruction. They would be just like the Canaanite nations (7:1), who, subject to the *hērem* of God’s holy wrath, had to be rooted out (cf. 7:4). As he had warned previously (7:25–26), for Israel to participate in pagan ways was to invite the doom reserved for pagan practice.⁵

⁵ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 188.

App: In our situation, we must acknowledge that we could likewise experience stern chastisement if we fail to obey the voice of the Lord. When we obey, God has good reasons to bless us. When we disobey, God has good reasons to discipline us. If we want to prosper and enjoy the blessings of God, it's in our own best interests to obey God's commandments. It's best to remember what God has done for us, remain dependent on him, and not become proud of our own accomplishments.

This is a very practical passage for us.

The danger for us is that we do exactly what Moses warned about here: forgetting God because of our prosperity.

When things are hard/difficult, we tend to complain and doubt that God cares about us. Poverty can certainly be a test. Will we rely on God when we are poor?

Prosperity can also be a test. The tendency is to slack up and become indulgent, self-satisfied, and proud when we have plenty. We tend to give credit to ourselves for all we've accomplished. The temptation is to become proud of ourselves and of our accomplishments when we are prosperous. We forget God.

Whatever our lot in life, whether poverty or prosperity, we must retain our dependence on God. We must rely on God for every word that comes forth from his mouth. And we must rely on God to provide everything we need. We must rely on God to give us the ability to gain wealth and prosperity. And if we gain some measure of prosperity, we are obligated to be thankful and humble, not to be proud and self-satisfied. We don't glory in what we've achieved; we glory in what the Lord has provided.

Note the emphasis on "today, this day" – vss. 1, 11, 19. There's an urgency here. We must respond to these exhortations today.

Remember what God has done; do not forget. Give credit to God; don't take it for yourself. Obey every commandment that comes forth from the mouth of God. Remain dependent on God or you may experience the perils of independence.