

Deuteronomy (Part 5) (1994)

God's Discipline, Care and Remembrance

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We are going to begin this final sermon in the series on Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy 7:6, we extracted a great deal out of this section, and we are going to use it here once again as a launching pad for just a very brief review before we roll into the topic that we have for today.

Deuteronomy 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the people on the face of the earth.”

Last week, we covered the final part of the holiness theme found in Deuteronomy, which began by showing that God clearly wants His people to be separate from the world. That is so clearly shown here in chapter 7 because He wanted them to clear the land of the people who inhabited it. It was their inheritance. And He did not want them to be contaminated by any kind of degeneration by the contact that they would undoubtedly have with these people. And He was especially concerned about them being led into idolatry.

For the Israelite, this separation was a physical one. And it is shown by His commandment that He did not want them occupying the same land with these other people.

For us, the separation is primarily spiritual and moral, and to some extent, social. This demand is much more difficult than the one demanded of the Israelites, because the very configuration of the church finds people in it called from all walks of life and from all nations, and therefore it is not located in one specific area of the earth.

Holiness is both imputed and achieved. Neither of these can be met except through love. God's love for us accomplishes the first. And then we must respond by loving Him with all of our heart, all of our mind, all of our being.

This will accomplish the second one, which the apostle Paul, in II Corinthians 7:1 calls, “perfecting holiness.”

The state of holiness into which we are put by God, in which we play some small part, is by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. But that is not the end. That is only the beginning of a process that Paul calls "perfecting holiness." Most of a Christian's life is made up of this step, which leads to us being in the image of God.

The means to do this is in us by the Holy Spirit. But we have to seek God, and with all our heart, obey Him. So we both seek Him with all of our heart, and we obey Him with all of our heart. As we do, we get to know Him through the experiences of life that we have together. We learn how faithful, merciful, generous, concerned He is. Any other quality that you can think of about Him begins to be a part of our experience and thus a part of us as well.

So the relationship grows to the place where we do not want it to end; where we will make any sacrifice to prove our loyalty and to keep the relationship strong and growing. It is the kind of relationship that, if it were human, it would end in marriage. You can see the parallel that we have in the relationship with God.

But just having a close relationship is not all of God's purpose. As a creator, He is building—He is creating—in us an image of Himself. And this is where the phrase comes from that He is reproducing Himself. Indeed, He is doing just that. It is not the normal reproductive process that that we find physically, but we are nonetheless being reproduced in His image. This requires time. It requires an education. It requires training. It requires obedience. It requires testing to accomplish these things.

As we are, we are not fit. We might say we are not qualified (a bad word to some) for the Kingdom of God—for His Family Kingdom. Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we indeed do qualify legally. Our character must be in the image of the Father and the Son, and thus the need for the discipline that God provides for all of His children.

Obedience plays a major role in God's plan. It shows God that we are living our lives, coping with the present realities—that is, what is going on in our

life. But we are doing it with our eyes and our hearts on the Kingdom of God—on the future—preparing for the time when that future will be the present.

Now, brethren, this is the only way to live. Obedience shows that we are acting out a living hope. The fear of God, faith in God, hope in the great future that is before us, and love—the love of God in us—every single one of them motivates us to obedience. And obedience, in turn, is the evidence that the others are working in a person's life. And when God observes obedience, He blesses. That is His promise in Deuteronomy 28. He promises there material blessings. Well, that does not mean that under the New Covenant He will not bless with material blessings. Certainly He will. But that is not His primary thrust. Under the New Covenant are the spiritual blessings. He will prosper and bless people materially as well.

We have to understand that many times His blessing turn out to be greater responsibility and therefore more intense and difficult trials. That is good. It means that we are growing. And so as people grow, the intensity of the trials also increases. I should not just limit that to intensity. The difficulty of the trial increases also. Just as a test for a 12th grade student is much more difficult than a test is for a first grade student, so it is only to be expected. It has to be that way, because the 12th grade student has advanced so much farther beyond what the first grader has.

It is the same way with God. As we grow, the intensity—the difficulty—of the tests increase proportionally. Remember, He gives us a promise in I Corinthians 10:13 that He will never give us a trial—never give us a test—that is too great for us, because He does not want to see us fail. So it always will be within the capabilities of Him working within us. And if we will just yield, it will be accomplished.

As we conclude this series, we are going to do it on a theme that touches directly or indirectly on many of the other themes that we have already covered. And what I have done here is, I have linked three sub-themes—I almost cringe saying "sub-themes" because they actually play a pretty big part in the book of Deuteronomy. I have done this partly because I want to get done with this series and move on. Every one of these sub-themes could

easily be expanded into a full sermon, and perhaps a whole series all by themselves. But I have linked them together because they go together. And these three are (1) God's discipline, (2) our remembering, and (3) God's watchful care.

Deuteronomy 8:1-6 “Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land which the Lord swore to your fathers. [Please try to think of this in its New Testament implications, that you may live *eternally*, that you may possess the inheritance that I promised to Abraham and to his children.] And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you to know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens [or disciplines] his son, so the Lord, your God chastens you. Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God to walk in His ways and to fear Him.”

Deuteronomy 8:16 “Who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end.”

Now, let us add to that a series of verses in Deuteronomy 32, which is the song of Moses:

Deuteronomy 32:7 “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations. Ask your father, and he will show you; your elders and they will tell you.”

Deuteronomy 32:10-11 “He found him [that is, Jacob] in a desert land and in a wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him.

He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its nest, hovers over its young, spreading out his wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the Lord alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him.”

The whole of the pilgrimage through the wilderness has had within its scope purposes that are always drawing us towards God's end. Please remember that, because this has to be, this must be our worldview if we are going to endure. We are not just going to endure; we are going to grow as well. God is always pointing toward the end result. That is why I read that verse in Deuteronomy 8:16. Everything is being is drawn toward the latter end. And at the same time that all these things are going on, He is ever-watchful in His care of us. He really wants to impress this on us because it is very easy for us to get distracted.

If our worldview is not pointed in the same direction as God's purpose toward the Kingdom of God, we will get lost. If we will not follow the Cloud, it will go off in the direction that is different from where we are going because our eyes are on something else.

At the same time, we always have to be conscious that He is in the Cloud. He is there. I hope you understand the spiritual implication of this. In spite of the way circumstances look, He is there! And He is ever-watchful over us.

Each of the things that is mentioned in Deuteronomy 8:1-6 indeed might be gone into separately, but the thread of the whole thing there is that the discipline God puts us through is always pointed towards our putting reliance in Him, or as it states there, in His Word. And if we do that, then we are going to be well prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Turn to Deuteronomy 11:

Deuteronomy 11:1-3 “Therefore you shall love the Lord your God, and keep His charge, His statutes, His judgments, and His commandments always. Know today that I do not speak with your children, who have not known and who have not seen the chastening [or the discipline] of the Lord Your God, His greatness and His mighty hand and His outstretched arm—His signs and His

acts which He did in the midst of Egypt, to Pharaoh King of Egypt and to all his land.”

This is being directed, God says, at people of knowledge. And so if we apply that into our circumstance, it is directed at those who have been converted, and not to our children.

Deuteronomy 11:4-9 “What He did to the army of Egypt, and to their horses, and to their chariots: how He made waters of the Red Sea overflow them as they pursued you, and how the Lord has destroyed them to this to this day; what He did for you in the wilderness until you came to this place; and what he did to Dathan, and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, the son of Reuben [You see, He is rehearsing events. There is a reason for this.]: how the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, their households, their tents, and all their substance that was in their possession in the midst of all Israel—but your eyes have seen every great act of the Lord, which He did. Therefore you shall keep every commandment which I command you today [Look at this phrase. Why?], that you may be strong, and go in and possess the land which you cross over to possess, and that you may prolong your days in the land which the Lord swore to give to your fathers, to them and to their descendants, ‘a land flowing with milk and honey.’”

Here again, we have God rehearsing things, showing them that they need to remember the discipline and the disobedience of those who died within the wilderness. What He does here is He directly connects the discipline of verse 2 to the obedience of verses 8 and 9. Now obedience and being strong enough to receive one's inheritance and eternal life are specifically linked.

I specifically picked out this verse so that we will understand what it is that makes us strong. It is obedience to God's Word. That is the very exercise that will ensure that we will be strong enough for any trial that comes along, and at the same time will ensure that He is going to give us eternal life, and we will live long! Boy, is that not a blessing?

Obedience strengthens. Sin weakens. Obedience tends to life. Disobedience—sin—kills. Even though the contrast is not given there, it is implied in the way that it is stated.

God emphasizes remembering because it is such a powerful tool. It is a motivational tool toward doing the right thing.

Let us drop back to Deuteronomy 5. This is a rehearsing of the commandments. The fourth commandment is changed in the book of Deuteronomy from Exodus 20, and we are going to read [the portion] where the change is. I think that it is significant.

Deuteronomy 5:15 “And remember that you were a slave. . .”

Part of the commandments of God is that we never forget that we were a slave. Remember that. That is part of keeping the fourth commandment.

Now let us turn to Deuteronomy 7:

Deuteronomy 7:18 “You shall not be afraid of them [the people in the land], but you shall remember well what the Lord your God did the Pharaoh and to all Egypt.”

Let us go to the New Testament to another series of scriptures that emphasizes remembering. We are going to go to II Peter 1. This section immediately follows instruction that is, I think, familiar to every one of us. We may not know it in a great deal of detail, but it rings a bell, that how we are to give all diligence, add your faith virtue, to your virtue knowledge, to knowledge, self-control, and so forth. Picking it up in verse 8:

II Peter 1:8-9 For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted even to blindness [Is such a person going to be strong or weak?], and has forgotten that he was purged of his old sins.

Part of the keeping of the fourth commandment is to remember that we were slaves to sin, and the person who backslides in these areas has forgotten that he was a slave to sin.

II Peter 1:10-15 Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things, you will never stumble; for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them and are established in the present truth. Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as the Lord Jesus Christ showed me. Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of things after my decease.

The word “remember” appears more times in the book of Deuteronomy than any other book in the Bible except Psalms. And we might even say that the book of Psalms might be called a book of remembrances, because what are the psalmists doing? They are remembering God's works in the past. They are remembering how God is working in people's lives right now, and they are reminding us of what God is going to do in the future. So, we have a whole book dedicated to remembering. But in the book of Deuteronomy, it is a theme that is very important.

The word “remembering” appears more times in Deuteronomy than any book except Psalms. And in addition to the word remembering, the phrase or the warning against forgetting appears nine more times in the book of Psalms.

Remembering is a consciousness of what is past or what happened in the past. That is what it is most of the time. It is not always that, but probably about 90 percent of the time, it is a consciousness of what happened in the past.

Memory may either be a help or a hindrance. It depends on what we choose to remember because our memories, indeed, are selective. We can choose to

think about things that never should have been done. That is, that we should have never done them. Some take a perverse joy in reliving their badness all over again. I have even heard people say, “Weren’t we bad?”

Some of us looking back on bygone days, select the things that we want to think about are nothing more than vanities and trifles as if they were the main thing in life. The Israelites did this. What did they remember about Egypt? The “wonderful” food that they had! I wonder if their memory was exaggerated somewhat, because it hardly seems likely to me that a slave really had all that great food. You see, their memory pictured it as being something better than it actually was. They were being selective there because it really was not all that good.

Some look back like a Rembrandt painting. Have you ever seen any Rembrandt paintings? They are all dark browns and black. There is hardly ever a ray of sunshine that appears in anything that he painted. It is as though these people are feeding a sentimental melancholy—dark, depressing.

I will tell you, I personally think that this is a disastrous way of thinking, because it is going to drag them down, change their attitude into something that ought not to be.

The purpose of remembering the things God specifies is to keep a Christian a Christian, and to keep them growing.

As Peter just showed us here in II Peter 1, that is a major responsibility of a preacher; we preachers seem to go on *ad nauseam*, but there is no other way to keep the Christian faith alive. This is because our faith is built upon a knowledge of what happened in the past. And we must do this because memory is capricious. It slips into obscurity if it is not kept alive.

What we preachers are doing is relating our present-day experiences to what God shows in His word is normal in life with Him. This keeps Christianity from going stale and from degenerating. It also protects us from heresy. There would be no going back to the faith once delivered or the keeping of the faith if we were not constantly reminded of it in its purest and most vivid

instances, and that is what the Bible gives us. God says, “This is My standard; I want you to remember!” God says, “This is the way I acted in the past and I do not change.”

But our lives get all jumbled up by the events that we are going through. We begin to become disoriented. But remembering what God has done in the past reorients us right back on the track once again. He keeps emphasizing this over and over again—“Remember what I did!”—because it brings us back, and points us in the right direction once again. That is why I said, remembering keeps a Christian, Christian, and remembering keeps us from going stale. It keeps alive the hopes that are within us.

Remembering is what motivates us to go on because we want to be reminded of the great goal—the vision, the purpose. We need to be reminded of those things that God has for us. Believe me, God is a believer that repetition is the best form of emphasis.

God directs us in Deuteronomy 8:2, as well as here in II Peter, to remember His involvement in our lives. He says, “Remember that I went with you all away.” What God wants us to understand is that this world and all the things that are going on in our lives is nothing more than scaffolding upon which He is rearing us to be like Him.

He is telling us in Deuteronomy 8:2 that our lives have a purpose so far beyond the importance of individual events that there is no way to adequately express it, to the latter end, to the end. God is always pointing in that direction, and it is hard because we are so physical, to keep our minds on that because it becomes focused on the immediate.

And so He gives us this wonderful story that He took Israel through—recorded the events; showed us the very height of faith, as well as the lowest things—and He says, “Look, just keep remembering these things, and it will keep you on track. Your worldview has to be guided by this, or you are going to lose it, or not grow anywhere near the way we would grow.”

Thus, remembering keeps Christianity from going stale and degenerating.

So He is telling us that our lives have a purpose so far beyond the importance of individual events, that it cannot really be expressed. He is telling us to always remember that nothing happened without a cause—another major principle that we need to remember.

Remember that proverb that says that the curse causeless shall not come? Things do not just happen. They are caused. God wants us to remember that principle. It is expressed so clearly in the wilderness journey. And it is the book of Deuteronomy that keeps reminding us, reminding us, reminding us, what He wants us to remember.

I guess in an overall sense, He wants us to remember that we are a *special* people. Not *better*. We are holy because He chose us. And so our lives are going to be different from other people's lives, because He is pointing us toward an end that He has chosen for us. We are to look back on life's ups and downs, its joys and sorrows; its work and its rest; and know that its seeming contrariness and conditions are all for the purpose of making us (I could just stop the sentence there, thinking of the way that we kind of use English now), for making it plain to us, who we are. We are a people separated unto Him for His purpose.

He wants us to remember that the good things of life are not always pleasurable. Did you get that? The good things in life are not always pleasurable. Discipline usually is accompanied by pain. That does not necessarily mean He is spanking us.

Armies have to discipline their troops, and it is painful for the recruit to go through those. But the lives of the men, and indeed the recruit's life, depends upon that discipline. The success of the army depends upon that discipline; an army has to move as a unit—as a team. And so they have to take, in one sense, the individuality away from the individual recruits, so that he sees himself as a part of a team—all of the discipline that they go through—drill, drill, drill; practice, practice, practice; over and over again—until they see themselves as part of a unit. It is not easy. They get braced up by the drill sergeant. They are humbled by him and made to feel like they are nothing more than an old dog face. But it is pointed toward the end of making that person a good soldier—not a good civilian, a good soldier.

So God disciplines His people and it is not always pleasurable to go through His discipline. But you have His promise that it is always pointed toward something that is good—toward the latter end that we might be in His Kingdom. They are good because of what they produce. Even though it might be frightening, it might be painful to go through the experience, He wants us to remember that He is always there, regardless of the circumstances. Discipline, remembering, and His watchful care cannot be separated. Now, if He was not watchful in His care, He might very easily lose us. And so He is there evaluating.

The reflection or the remembering that God commands is to produce two main things: First, conclusions leading to more careful obedience, greater faith, hope, and love, all which are also passed on to the children.

Second, He wants thankfulness to be produced from it. These are expressed in the phrase, “That you may learn that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord.”

Do you realize that man lives by everything that comes out of God's mouth? I mean *everything*. Our physical life exists because God spoke. God spoke and it was done—there was a universe. God spoke and there was the earth. God spoke and there was air for us to breathe. God spoke and there were trees, and insects, and soil; and there were also laws.

Because God spoke, He commanded these things to come forth; God spoke and there was a garden; God spoke and Adam and Eve were formed out of the dust of the ground; God spoke: He breathed into them and gave them life. God speaks and there are weather patterns. Everything comes from the word of God.

We can understand that. But here the reference in Deuteronomy 8 is more specific to spiritual life, and the illustration that He gives is that He caused them to hunger so that they would understand this.

We do have life apart from God's written Word. But God's written Word adds a dimension that is not available anywhere else. God's written Word gives meaning and worth to existence. We exist because God spoke, but that

is not good enough for God. He wants people to live as He lives, but this requires our cooperation in obedience, belief, the love of His Word. He can create life by fiat. But He cannot reproduce what He is by fiat, because He has restrained Himself in giving us free moral agency. Therefore, our cooperation is required. But cooperation with what?

Cooperation with His Word—what He has spoken and caused to be written.

He caused them to hunger, to do what? To create a dependence on Him. That is what is behind this.

God's Word gives meaning and worth to existence. But what He is saying here in Deuteronomy 8 is that a person's spirit needs to be fed, just as well as his body. However, the need of that hunger is less obvious than the physical. We get hungry about every 4 to 6 hours, and we are very well aware of it. But the spirit starves slowly, and its hunger can go unrecognized for a lifetime.

How will starvation of the spirit show up? You know, He tells us right in Deuteronomy 8. Let us turn there. He does not explain everything here, but right after telling us that He made them hunger so that they would learn this lesson, that man must live by every word of God, He then went on to illustrate the principle that starves the spirit.

Deuteronomy 8:7 "For the Lord Your God is bringing you into a good land. . ."

Notice the word, "for," right off. It is connected with the first six verses, and it is an explanation of His concern. Why was He concerned that they learned to live by every word of God? Why was He concerned that they remember the whole way? Why was He concerned enough to humble them by making them starve?

Deuteronomy 8:7-9 "For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and springs, that flow out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey; a land in which you will eat bread without scarcity, in which you will

lack nothing; a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can dig copper."

That sounds wonderful!

We have to start asking a question here. Could they handle it? Oh, we can remember from God's word that they could not handle living in that wonderful place. Why?

Deuteronomy 8:10-14 "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God. . .

What does, "Heart is lifted up" mean? It means pride, does it not? What does pride lead one to do? Forget!

Deuteronomy 8:14-20 ". . . who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end—then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.' And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day. Then it shall be, if you by any means forget the LORD your God, and follow other gods, and serve them and worship them, I testify against you this day that you shall surely perish. As the nations which the LORD destroys before you, so you shall perish, because you would not be obedient to the voice of the LORD your God."

How will starvation of the spirit show up? God has told us—through pride. We will call it self-sufficiency: My own hand and my power have gotten me these things. Who gave them the land? It is God who gave them power to get wealth.

I might add right here, that in an overall sense, that is true for everybody on earth simply because God is the Creator. God put the wealth available to anybody who is either fortunate enough or works hard enough to accumulate those things.

But this is something that is extremely important to God's people. Jesus emphasized it in John 15 where He said, “I am the vine and you are the branches; without Me, you can do nothing.”

Our spiritual dependency depends upon our link to Him. That is what God is talking about here. He is saying it in a physical context. But we are looking at it in a spiritual context. So pride, self-sufficiency, self-trust will rear their ugly heads, and the results will be that sinning will become a way of life. That is what He told us in those 14 verses there.

God used hunger and the manna to create a recognition of dependence upon Him. This is a major concept that He wanted them to remember especially, when they came into the land, and when they prospered.

It is conceivable to say that when we feel a sense of security and strength in ourselves that we are most in danger of drifting from God. If one's pride is too strong, then one relies on himself; if one has a good measure of prosperity, then one tends to rely on it rather than God.

Remember the rich man? What was his high tower? His wealth was his high tower, his wealth was his strong city. If one has consistently good health, then the person's reliance tends to be on his own strength. Who needs God when you feel a sense of strength? Hunger made them weak. Hunger made them cry out to God.

And so the Christian's life frequently seems to be precarious, and troubles his lot. But God reminds us that though this is true, there was never a time that He did not supply their needs eventually.

If they will reflect on these things, then maybe they will even be able to survive the good times too. I think that it is a truism. It is not always true. But it is something that is generally true.

If Satan wants to destroy somebody, he will prosper them, because very few people can handle it. We all like to think that we can, but it has a way of subtly turning our heads to dependence on ourselves—self-trust, self-sufficiency. And, if we feel weakness, we will cry out to God.

Now, God did this, He said, to humble them.

Just to give you a little bit of an example, turn to Isaiah 66 to see how important this is in the overall scope of things. These are verses that we are quite familiar with.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look ["This is going to get My attention. This impresses Me," is what He is saying]: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."

Remember Deuteronomy 8:3, "I humbled you that you might learn that every man lives by every word of God."

One of the ways to help appreciate the importance of humility is to look at it in contrast to the high regard that the Israelites had for the Temple. I mean, that was the most important thing in the entire nation other than maybe the ark itself. But the Temple held the ark, and the Temple was the national symbol of their uniqueness; their uniqueness was the Covenant. They were the only nation (this is what made them unique) on earth that God made a covenant with, and that Temple represented that uniqueness. And so, if the

Temple was destroyed, then Israel's uniqueness (that which gave them their sense of well-being) disappeared with the Temple.

They were a people who then felt abandoned because the place in which God dwelt was gone. So when the Temple was destroyed, the backbone—the spirit of the people—was destroyed right along with it. And when the Temple was erected the second time, even though it was not as great as the one that was before, it still served to begin to revive them, because they felt that God was, once again, with them.

The Temple undoubtedly not only was important, but it was also very beautiful as well. However, God is showing here that the Temple, though in no way despised by Him (you have to kind of think about this—Him who fills the universe), the Temple was nowhere near as important to Him as a humble person is who deeply respects His Word, and is eagerly awaiting a revelation from Him so that he could conform to it. Tremble means to fear in anticipation, not necessarily in terror; it shows the eager anticipation of a revelation from God.

Let us add a little bit to that and go back to Isaiah 57:

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

He *inhabits* eternity. Eternity sums up time completely—the past, the present, and the future. From everlasting to everlasting is another way it is stated in the Bible. In Psalm 90:2 it says, “from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.” He is the One who knows the end from the beginning. It says that He appoints the times and the seasons. It does not mean the seasons of the year, but rather it means the times and seasons of the rise of nations and the fall of nations; the time and season of the rise of a king, or the fall of a king. It is showing that He is involved with His creation, and He is directing (at least, overseeing) what is going on. It is an expression that shows that He is intimately involved; nothing occurs without Him passing judgment on it.

God is in complete control of the entire timeline in its endless procession, and in every direction. It has no beginning; it has no end.

God is so lofty and high—in heaven there is an angel, and the great prophet Daniel took one look at Gabriel and fainted dead, practically. And yet, that mighty cherub is nothing compared to God.

And yet, this God says that He dwells with the humble and the contrite. That verse in Isaiah 66 has been put in the Bible to help us see a contrast of how important one is in comparison to another. We in our physicalness—in our carnality—tend to look at something that man built as being great. But God says, "No. Here is something that is even greater than the most beautiful building that has ever been built on the face of the earth—a humble person." That is how important that is. That is why He worked to produce humility in these people—a dependence upon Him. He allowed them to hunger, He made them hunger in order to produce humility.

Now, the people who are humble have enough self-distrust that they will listen to God with the fullest intent of submitting to Him, regardless of the circumstances of their life.

Turn with me to Matthew 5. Here is the foundation of God's way of life for a Christian. It begins in Matthew 5, goes through 6, and into chapter 7. At the very beginning of it, is the first verse of the foundation:

Matthew 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

It is said that it is no wonder that this beatitude is given first, because all of the others owe their existence to it; that it is the root from which the others grow.

To be poor in spirit, or to be humble, is to acknowledge spiritual bankruptcy. Let us try to make this very plain.

Poor, by implication here, is contrasted to rich. If a person is poor in spirit, he is bankrupt spiritually. Now, a bankrupt person (let us switch back to

economics here so that we can see the metaphor) is one who has to place complete dependence for sustenance and support from others, because the implication is they have no income, but they have great debt; they have no way to pay it.

Very frequently in the Old Testament, you will see the word "poor." It does not necessarily mean poor in terms of money. It does not mean poor economically. It simply means, "weak; without strength." A person who has little money is also weak and has a little strength economically as well.

However, those who are weak would also be viewed by God, let us say, as being in the middle class or even let us say, the upper-middle class. But they do not have the political clout or the religious clout, that other people in the community do. This is especially true as you are going through the book of Amos. I would say that virtually every one of us in the church of God would be considered in the Old Testament to be poor, even though our income might be very sufficient to take care of us. But politically, we are without power and therefore we are poor. We are weak.

Let us put this back in here to Matthew 5: A bankrupt person is one who is completely dependent on others for sustenance and support. He needs to be fed because he does not have any money to buy food. Somebody else has to buy it or to give it to him. He does not have a job. Such a person has no security. He has no means of support. And he has no strength.

The other, upon whom one is completely dependent on in the spiritual realm, is God.

Let us turn to James 4 to begin to tie this together.

James 4:6 But He gives more grace. Therefore He says: "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

Pride resists God. God resists pride. But those who are poor in spirit will allow God to feed—to strengthen, to sustain—them by means of His Word, because they have no sense of self-generated worthiness. They are weak and they know it!

Think of this in terms of the Israelites in the wilderness: God made them to hunger. They were then, by sheer circumstance, forced to cry out to Him to provide for them. That is the lesson of why He did it. It produced in them dependence upon Him.

I have gone through this so that you will all understand that much of what we go through in life is designed by God to break our spirit of self-trust, self-sufficiency, our pride—in order so that we get to the place where we recognize our dependence upon Him, and we will cry out to Him to supply what we need. And we will look at His Word to see whether or not He will supply it. We will look at His Word to see how we ought to live. We will look at His Word to remember how He reacted in the past. We will look in His Word for the promises that He gives. We will look at His Word for the strength that we need to sustain us through the difficult trial that we find ourselves in.

So the Christian is very frequently going to find his life to be precarious economically, health-wise, you name it! But He is always there, and He always supplies. That is the lesson.

It is no wonder that He works so diligently to create this great virtue, and it is not easily come by. But it opens the way for him to pour out His wonderful blessings to those who will hear Him.

Jesus, in the New Testament, put it this way, found in John 6, “The words that I speak to you, they are spirit and they are life.” It is the New Testament paraphrase of Deuteronomy 8:3.

Before we conclude, I want to spend a bit of time on a series of verses that He gave us there in Deuteronomy 32. So let us go back there and rehearse those verses, because I have a couple of times said in this sermon that He is always there.

Deuteronomy 32:10-12 “He found him in a desert land and in the wasteland, a howling wilderness; He encircled him, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirs up its

nest, hovers over its young, spreading out its wings, taking them up, carrying them on its wings, so the LORD alone led him, and there was no foreign god with him.”

God was not merely watching over them so that they would learn to rely on Him, but what these verses are showing is that He was also training them for bigger things. This is expressed beautifully back in the book of Hosea. I want you to turn there so we will see what He is talking about.

Hosea 11:1 “When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.”

Hosea 11:3-4 “I taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by their arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I drew them with gentle cords, with bands of love, and I was to them as those who take the yoke from their neck. I stooped and fed them.”

Hosea 11:8 “How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I set you like Zeboiim? My heart churns within Me; My sympathy is stirred.”

This is what God is doing for each of us. And the only difference between Hosea 11 and Deuteronomy 32, is that what He does is expressed in different metaphors.

The one there in Hosea is particularly touching because it shows God gently, as one would teach a child how to walk, standing over them with His hands on our arms—one step, two steps, three steps, four steps, five steps—but He is always there, ready to catch us whenever we fall, whenever we stumble. And you know how uncertain our children are—our babies—when they are learning how to walk. He even shows in a little bit different metaphor, the one in verse 4, as if we were an animal. In this case, He has us harnessed.

Have you ever seen children harnessed with a strap-like material around their chest and it is tied to the mother's hand or whatever? Sure you have. There is nothing new under the sun. They were doing things like this way back then.

But He is using that to help the child to learn to do something that is going to be very important to his life. He is showing there, in the gentlest of terms, of how He wants to deal with us and how He will deal with us, unless we become hardheaded and recalcitrant, then He has to use, like any parent would who loves his children, a stronger discipline to straighten them out.

I once read where a man said that whole vast and awesome creation was created for the sake of growing good men and women. But that statement implies that we are not good at the beginning, or at least we are not what we should be, or will become at the end. And something must be done in order to suit God's purpose.

In the context of Deuteronomy, what God did was He took a completely dependent slave people, and He trained them for a mature and responsible national life as a nation. If you are thinking, you will understand that He is doing the same thing to us, except that it is on a much greater and more important level, because now we are dealing with eternity. He is creating a Family; He is creating a nation—it is the Kingdom of God. We are part of a new creation to which He is eventually going to give this earth as our inheritance.

What is presented in Deuteronomy 32 is using the eagle in a vivid contrast between what is generally fairly well known of them, and a seeming contradiction that is a part of their makeup—a part of their conduct.

What is known about an eagle is that it is the undisputed master of the skies. It has no challengers among the bird kingdom. It is one of the most powerful of all animals.

I read one time of an eagle which swooped down on a hapless dog. It was a hunting dog of some kind. And this eagle grabbed that dog by the head, and its talon punctured the skull of the dog. That is how much power there is there. It picked the dog up and took it away. It was not a large dog, probably something about the size of a beagle. Later on, the dog's owner found the owner of the eagle. I mean, this was a like a trained eagle. He found the dog and the eagle, and the eagle's talon was inside the dog's brain.

That is power; that is seemingly impossible in a bird, but it is there, nonetheless. And so its powerful beak and claw; it has a wonderful, beautiful magnificence sweep of wing; it is rapid; its seemingly unwearied flight, and it has piercing eyes, as though nothing escapes its gaze from way up in the sky somewhere. And it can come swooping down on some hapless prey out of the sky that seemed to be empty just a few moments before. Now, all of us are at least somewhat aware of these things. We have seen videos of eagles swooping down and maybe picking a fish right off the top of the water and flying off with it.

But the eagle has another side that is in no way destructive at all. This powerful creature, this monarch of the skies, also busies itself with the tender care of its brood. And so the contrast that God is giving here is that there is a gentleness as well as a terribleness that is within the life of an eagle. And the eagle, in the metaphor, is, of course, God.

On the one hand, we are dealing with the awesome and undisputed Master whose power is so terrible that with one stroke of the arm, a universe could disappear. He could grab the earth, as it were, in His hands and smash it into dust, and it would no longer exist. And He sits on high, where His Spirit penetrates every portion of this universe. Nothing escapes His gaze. And yet for all of that, His Word shows us that there is a tenderness that allows Him to take care of any service that His children might need. Jesus stooped and washed the feet of His disciples to illustrate that side of His character.

Brethren, we have to keep both of these views in mind at the same time—that God is in balance; He is an equipoise and God has given us illustrations of both in His Word, and He wants us to remember. He can be the highest or the lowest of servants. It all depends on what we need is the way that He is going to act.

Now, what is this all for? Well, it is so interesting because of a word that we use today in our speech; it is a descriptive term. It is so we can learn to fly.

You know, just think of the modern connotation of that word: so that our lives will soar to the heights that He is; so that we will be in His image; so that we will be like Him; so that we will be able to share eternity with Him; so that we will have character, a personality like His; so that we can live.

Why? We all understand the illustration that comes from this—how He stirs up the nest, and He kicks the young ones out of it, always watching with watchful care, teaching them so that they will leave the nest and become independent.

He provides for His children first with short flights in order to prepare them with longer ones. God stirs the nest of our lives because most of the time we would be very content to stay the way we are as long as we feel comfortable. And so God makes us feel uncomfortable so that He stirs up the nest. He boots us out, but He is always watching. If we started to plummet, He swoops down, catches us, and bears us up again.

The word “hovers” here is interesting. It is exactly the same word that is translated in Genesis 1:2 about the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. It can be translated, “to brood.” It does not merely mean that God is over there watching, but rather it means that He is watching and meditating, thinking, evaluating. What is He doing? It says in Psalms 11:4, “His eyelids test the sons of men.” It means He is evaluating what is going on. It tells us that we are the apple of His eye. He is focusing on us. He has others in view, but His real focus is on us. It tells us an Isaiah 49:16 that we are written on the palms of His hands. And so we are getting a special attention that only God is able to give. We are receiving personal instruction and care.

Surely there is a corporate body, yes, called a church. But God does not leave out any single individual for personal instruction. His eyelids are testing the sons of men. Jesus said, “I go and prepare a place for you.” If He is doing that, He is preparing us to fit into the place that He has prepared for us so that we will be able to fit into that position.

Let us go to Philippians 1 which will sum this up:

Philippians 1:6 . . . being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.

God begins our salvation, and God will end it. And in between there will be all kinds of experiences that are designed to fit us into His purpose, which is to put us into His Family in the Kingdom of God.

And so, that beautiful metaphor there in Deuteronomy 32 is intended to show us that His concern is not general. His concern for each person is very specific. Though of awesome power, He is also One of concern—evaluating, preparing—that we might fit in.

Just a moment's review: Beginning with the Feast of Tabernacles, we saw Deuteronomy's unique position; then *vision* for this critical period of time. We were shown that Deuteronomy encourages the *fear of God*. It shows that we are in a position to do what we are doing because of God's grace and God's faithfulness, that our responsibility is to work towards perfecting *holiness*. We have to find out how we can do what holiness requires, and that is to seek God and to love God with all of our hearts. This, in turn, will produce *obedience*. And then we find God's *discipline*, our *remembering*, and God's *sustaining watchful care*.

What Deuteronomy does is to give us a fairly concise overview of our responsibility for preparing to receive our inheritance, a charge to remember what God has done in the past, and the encouragement that He is always with us and that we *will* make it.