

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

An exhortation to obedience from a consideration of God's past mercies, Deuteronomy 8:1, Deuteronomy 8:2. Man is not to live by bread only, but by every word of God, Deuteronomy 8:3. How God provided for them in the wilderness, Deuteronomy 8:4. The Lord chastened them that they might be obedient, Deuteronomy 8:5, Deuteronomy 8:6. A description of the land into which they were going, Deuteronomy 8:7-9. Cautions lest they should forget God in their prosperity, Deuteronomy 8:10-16, and lest they should attribute that prosperity to themselves, and not to God, Deuteronomy 8:17, Deuteronomy 8:18. The terrible judgments that shall fall upon them, should they prove unfaithful, Deuteronomy 8:19, Deuteronomy 8:20.

Verse 2

Thou shalt remember all the way - The various dealings of God with you; the dangers and difficulties to which ye were exposed, and from which God delivered you; together with the various miracles which he wrought for you, and his longsuffering towards you.

Verse 3

He - suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee - God never permits any tribulation to befall his followers, which he does not design to turn to their advantage. When he permits us to hunger, it is that his mercy may be the more observable in providing us with the necessities of life. Privations, in the way of providence, are the forerunners of mercy and goodness abundant.

Verse 4

Thy raiment waxed not old, etc. - The plain meaning of this much-tortured text appears to me to be this: "God so amply provided for them all the necessities of life, that they never were obliged to wear tattered garments, nor were their feet injured for lack of shoes or sandals." If they had carvers, engravers, silversmiths, and jewelers among them, as plainly appears from the account we have of the tabernacle and its utensils, is it to be wondered at if they also had habit and sandal makers, etc., etc., as we are certain they had weavers, embroiderers, and such like? And the traffic which we may suppose they carried on with the Moabites, or with travelling hordes of Arabians, doubtless supplied them with the materials; though, as they had abundance of sheep and neat cattle, they must have had much of the materials within themselves. It is generally supposed that God, by a miracle, preserved their clothes from wearing out: but if this sense be admitted, it will require, not one miracle, but a chain of the most successive and astonishing miracles ever wrought, to account for the thing; for as there were not less than 600,000 males born in the wilderness, it would imply, that the clothes of the infant grew up with the increase of his body to manhood, which would require a miracle to be continually wrought on every thread, and on every particle of matter of which that thread was composed. And this is not all; it would imply that the clothes of the parent became miraculously lessened to fit the body of the child, with whose growth they were again to stretch and grow, etc. No such miraculous interference was necessary.

Verse 8

A land of wheat, etc. - On the subject of this verse I shall introduce the following remarks, which I find in Mr. Harmer's Observations on the Fertility of the Land of Judea, vol. iii., p. 243.

"Hasselquist tells us that he ate olives at Joppa (upon his first arrival in the Holy Land) which were said to grow on the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem; and that, independently of their oiliness, they were of the best kind he had tasted in the Levant. As olives are frequently eaten in their repasts, the delicacy of this fruit in Judea ought not to be forgotten; and the oil that is gotten from these trees much less, because still more often made use of. In the progress of his journey he found several fine vales, abounding with olive trees. He saw also olive trees in Galilee; but none farther, he says, than the mountain where it is supposed our Lord preached his sermon.

"The fig trees in the neighborhood of Joppa, Hasselquist goes on to inform us, were as beautiful as any he had seen in the Levant.

"The reason why pomegranates are distinctly mentioned, in this description of the productions of the land of promise, may be their great usefulness in forming cooling drinks, for they are used among the Asiatics nearly in the same way that we use lemons; see vol. ii., 145.

"Honey is used in large quantities in these countries; and Egypt was celebrated for the assiduous care with which the people there managed their bees. Maillet's account of it is very amusing. "There are," says he, "abundance of bees in that country; and a singular manner of feeding them, introduced by the Egyptians of ancient times, still continues there. Towards the end of October, when the Nile, upon its decrease, gives the peasants an opportunity of sowing the lands, sainfoin is one of the first things sown, and one of the most

profitable. As the Upper Egypt is hotter than the Lower, and the inundation there goes sooner off the lands, the sainfoin appears there first. The knowledge they have of this causes them to send their bee-hives from all parts of Egypt, that the bees may enjoy, as soon as may be, the richness of the flowers, which grow in this part of the country sooner than in any other district of the kingdom. The hives, upon their arrival at the farther end of Egypt, are placed one upon another in the form of pyramids, in boats prepared for their reception, after having been numbered by the people who place them in the boats. The bees feed in the fields there for some days; afterwards, when it is believed they have nearly collected the honey and wax, which were to be found for two or three leagues round, they cause the boats to go down the stream, two or three leagues lower, and leave them there, in like manner, such a proportion of time as they think to be necessary for the gathering up the riches of that canton. At length, about the beginning of February, after having gone the whole length of Egypt, they arrive at the sea, from whence they are conducted, each of them, to their usual place of abode; for they take care to set down exactly, in a register, each district from whence the hives were carried in the beginning of the season, their number and the names of the persons that sent them, as well as the number of the boats, where they are ranged according to the places they are brought from. What is astonishing in this affair is, that with the greatest fidelity of memory that can be imagined, each bee finds its own hive, and never makes any mistake. That which is still more amazing to me is, that the Egyptians of old should be so attentive to all the advantages deducible from the situation of their country; that after having observed that all things came to maturity sooner in Upper Egypt, and much later in Lower, which made a difference of above six weeks between the two extremities of their country, they thought of collecting the wax and the honey so as to lose none of them, and hit upon this ingenious method of making the bees do it successively, according to the blossoming of the flowers, and the arrangement of nature.â€”â€”

If this solicitude were as ancient as the dwelling of Israel in Egypt, they must have been anxious to know whether honey, about which they took such care in Egypt, was plentiful in the land of promise; and they must have been pleased to have been assured it was. It continues to be produced there in large quantities: Hasselquist, in the progress of his journey from Acra to Nazareth, tells us that he found â€œgreat numbers of bees, bred thereabouts, to the great advantage of the inhabitants.â€• He adds, â€œthey make their bee-hives, with little trouble, of clay, four feet long, and half a foot in diameter, as in Egypt. They lay ten or twelve of them, one on another, on the bare ground, and build over every ten a little roof.â€• Mr. Maundrell, observing also many bees in the Holy Land, takes notice that by their means the most barren places in other respects of that country become useful, perceiving in many places of the great salt plain near Jericho a smell of honey and wax as strong as if he had been in an apiary.

By Hasselquistâ€™s account it appears, that the present inhabitants of Palestine are not strangers to the use of hives. They are constructed of very different materials from ours, but just the same with the Egyptian hives. They seem to be an ancient contrivance; and indeed so simple an invention must be supposed to be as old as the days of Moses, when arts, as appears from his writings, of a much more elevated nature were known in Egypt. I cannot then well persuade myself to adopt the opinion of some of the learned, that those words of Moses, in Deuteronomy 32:13, He made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil cut of the flinty rock, are to be understood of his causing Israel to dwell in a country where sometimes they might find honey-comb in holes of the rock. It is very possible that in that hot country these insects, when not taken due care of, may get into hollow places of the rocks, and form combs there, as they sometimes construct them in ours in hollow trees, though I do not remember to have met with any traveler that has made such an observation. But would this have been mentioned with so much triumph by Moses in this place? The quantities of honey produced after this manner could be but small, compared with what would be collected in hives properly managed; when found, it must often cost a great deal of pains to get the honey out of these little cavities in the hard stone, and much the greatest part must be absolutely lost to the inhabitants. The interpretation is the more strange, because when it is said in the next clause, â€œand oil out of the flinty rock,â€• it is evidently meant that they should have oil produced in abundance by olive trees growing on flinty rocks; and consequently, the sucking honey out of the rock should only mean their enjoying great quantities of honey, produced by bees that collected it from flowers growing among the rocks: the rocky mountains of this country, it is well known, produce an abundance of aromatic plants proper for the purpose. Nor does Asaph, in the close of the eighty-first Psalm, speak, I apprehend, of honey found in cavities of rocks; nor yet is he there describing it as collected from the odoriferous plants that grow in the rocky hills of those countries, if the reading of our present Hebrew copies be right: but the prophet tells Israel that, had they been obedient, God would have fed them with the fat of wheat, and with the rock of honey would he have satisfied them, that is, with the most delicious wheat, and with the richest, most invigorating honey, in large quantities, both for eating and making agreeable drink. Its reviving, strengthening quality appears in the story of Jonathan, Saulâ€™s son, 1 Samuel 14:27; as the using the term rock to signify strength, etc., appears in a multitude of places. The rock of a sword, Psalm 89:43, for the edge of the sword, in which its energy lies, is, perhaps, as strange an expression to western ears.

I shall have occasion to speak of the excellence of the grapes of Judea in a succeeding chapter; I may therefore be excused from pursuing the farther examination of the productions of this country, upon giving my reader a remark of Dr. Shawâ€™s to this purpose, that it is impossible for pulse, wheat, or grain of any kind, to be richer

or better tasted than what is sold at Jerusalem. Only it may not be amiss to add, with respect to this country's being well watered, that the depth, תְּהוֹם (tehom), spoken of in this passage, seems to mean reservoirs of water filled by the rains of winter, and of great use to make their lands fertile; as the second word תְּאֻלֹּתֵיהָ (tealotheiha) seems to mean wells, or some such sort of conveniences, supplied by springs, and the first word; נַחֲרֹתֵיהָ (naharothaiha) rivers or running streams, whether carrying a larger or smaller body of water. What an important part of this pleasing description, especially in the ears of those that had wandered near forty years in a most dry and parched wilderness! I will only add, without entering into particulars, that the present face of the country answers this description.

Verse 9

A land whose stones are iron - Not only meaning that there were iron mines throughout the land, but that the loose stones were strongly impregnated with iron, ores of this metal (the most useful of all the products of the mineral kingdom) being every where in great plenty.

Out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass - As there is no such thing in nature as a brass mine, the word נְחֹשֶׁת (nechosheth) should be translated copper; of which, by the addition of the lapis calaminaris, brass is made. See on Exodus 25:3 (note).

Verse 15

Who led thee through that - terrible wilderness - See the account of their journeying in the notes, Exodus 16:1 (note), etc.; Numbers 21 (note), etc.

Fiery serpents - Serpents whose bite occasioned a most violent inflammation, accompanied with an unquenchable thirst, and which terminated in death. See on Numbers 21:6 (note).

Verse 16

Who fed thee - with manna - See this miracle described in Exodus 16:13 (note), etc.

Verse 18

God - giveth thee power to get wealth - Who among the rich and wealthy believes this saying? Who gives wisdom, understanding, skill, bodily strength, and health? Is it not God? And without these, how can wealth be acquired? Whose is providence? Who gives fertility to the earth? And who brings every proper purpose to a right issue? Is it not God? And without these also can wealth be acquired? No. Then the proposition in the text is self-evident: it is God that giveth power to get wealth, and to God the wealthy man must account for the manner in which he has expended the riches which God hath given him.