

In the wilderness they had to learn to trust the Lord to provide their needs. Now, in the promised land, with immediate needs more obviously secure, their relationship with the Lord was still crucial. As Eugene Petersen puts it, “So it’s paramount that you keep the commandments of GOD, your God, walk down the roads he shows you and reverently respect him” (*The Message*).

**Reflect:**

- At crisis times – such as war and drought – many will turn to God in prayer, but then seem to ignore him for the rest of their lives. Why is it important to remain “connected” to the Lord all the time? How can we encourage people to an active faith in the “good” times?

**Don’t Forget...**

“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise... your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (vv. 10-14).

There is the real possibility that they may say to themselves, “My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me” (v. 17).

But, even in their new settled situation, “remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today” (v. 18).

**Reflect:**

- In what ways are we most likely to “forget the Lord”?
- “It is [the Lord your God] who gives you the ability to produce wealth.” What is our appropriate response to the Lord in the midst of all our “know-how” and technology?

**2. Choosing the Lord!** Reading: Joshua 23-24.1-27

© Peter J Blackburn, 2004. Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version* © International Bible Society, 1984, and *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* © Eugene Peterson, 2002.



Studies for Home Groups  
by Peter J Blackburn

# 1. DON'T FORGET THE LORD!

**Reading: Deuteronomy 8**

It was 16 October 2004 and a group of us who had been ordained 40 years ago had gathered for a celebration. Many I had seen from time to time across the years. One or two I hadn't seen for many years. It was good to “catch up” again.

I was aware that some had quite a different theological stance from mine, read the Bible from a “liberal” viewpoint and had been on the other side of some recent contentious debates in the life of the church.

It had been suggested that we bring along some “symbol” and be prepared to talk about how we had “journeyed” in ministry. Only a few had actually done this. For myself, I had been “caught out”, having come away on a fortnight’s holiday without the vital letter of instruction.

Feeling in my pocket, I retrieved the key to my son’s back door and the accompanying button that armed or disarmed their security system. I held it up and said,

“I hold this up as a symbol of change. Forty years ago security systems like this hadn't been invented. Moreover, they were mostly unnecessary. Some people, even in the cities, didn't bother to lock their houses. But that has all changed.

“My late father, known to most of you, was a Methodist minister. Throughout his ministry he used a fountain pen. He never owned a typewriter. When he took RE in school, his only aid was a stick of chalk. Today I find a computer indispensable. Part of my ministry is exercised through a web site which currently attracts between 80 and 120 thousand ‘hits’ a month. We now take public address systems and photocopiers for granted. Many churches make regular and effective use of data projectors. So much has changed!

“But some things haven't changed! The grace of God is still available for all who believe. The Scriptures – the written Word of God – are still true. It is a good thing to make effective use of technology. But we make a grave mistake if we tamper with the Scriptures and fail to make available the grace of God for us in Jesus Christ.”

**Reflect:**

- There are many new ways of doing things. At what points have we departed from vital truth in the process? If we had the opportunity, what would we want to tell our society is the most important truth that we neglect at our peril?

**Preparing the People****Read: Deuteronomy 8.**

The book of Deuteronomy is a collection of Moses' last addresses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab. It includes the ten commandments (ch. 5), and in the next chapter the command to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (6.5) – words quoted by Jesus as part of his summary of the law.

The Israelites resided in the land of Goshen in the eastern part of the Nile delta for some 430 years (Ex. 12.40-41). They had multiplied to a point where they were perceived to pose a strategic threat to "a new king, who did not know about Joseph" (1.8) – not that the history of Joseph wasn't on the public record, but that there was resentment at the incursion of foreign influence into the Egyptian nation.

Moses – rescued from the Pharaoh's decree and brought up with the best Egyptian education – had fled Egypt after killing a cruel Egyptian task-master. Like Jacob fleeing Esau, he discovered that he had not moved away from the presence and call of God. He was to return to Egypt to go to Pharaoh "to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt" (3.10).

By the miraculous power of God, the reluctant Moses had brought the Israelite slaves into freedom. However, not long after they had crossed the Red Sea to freedom, they began to complain about food and water and Moses' leadership. They had hardly received the ten commandments when they made a golden calf as the god who had delivered them. And when the spies brought their report of the land, they were afraid and refused to move forward. That generation couldn't enter the promised land. It was forty years before the new generation would be ready to possess the land.

But now Moses was around 120 years. He had led them to the edge of the land. Joshua, one of the faithful spies, would carry on the leadership, bringing them across the Jordan and into the land of promise. How would they fare without him? The Lord had promised to be faithful to them, but

would they remain faithful to the Lord? As we recall the various events that had occurred as they had journeyed in the wilderness, such thoughts must inevitably have been in Moses' mind at this time.

**Remember...**

"Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know that was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands" (Deut. 8.2).

The institution of the Passover (Ex. 12) and of the later feasts was intended as a regular reminder of what the Lord had done for them in their history.

"He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut. 8.3) – words recalled by Jesus when he was tempted in the wilderness by the devil (Matt. 4.4).

Manna (the what-is-it food) and quail... The Lord had fed them physically. But it was more than the physical food – it was a whole process of learning to trust the Lord and his word. There was always sufficient for each day's needs, as is also implied by the specific word used in the Lord's prayer for "our daily bread".

"Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the Lord your God disciplines you" (Deut. 8.5) – words echoed in Heb. 12.7.

**Reflect:**

- We aren't meant to "live in the past". Yet it is important for us to remember. What are the significant times when our society remembers? Why are these times important? What are the significant times when our church remembers? Why are these times important?
- In what ways do our remembering times show what is in our heart and point us to the future?

**Obey...**

"Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and revering him" (Deut. 8.6).

It will be very different from their wilderness experience. The manna was fine, but they longed for a more varied diet. They are going to a good land, well-watered, productive – "where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing". It will also be rich in mineral resources (vv. 7-8).