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Sermon preached by Mr J K Popham
at Galeed Chapel Brighton
on Sunday morning 24 September 1922

DEUTERONOMY 8 v 2,3,and 4

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments, or no. And He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years".

It is God's gracious teaching that brings this back look to His people. It is His will that they should have this back look, lest they should entirely forget what His goodness has done for them, and how He has manifested to them His faithfulness, and His goodness, and His fullness. I do not want to distract your minds from Him who is the only proper object of faith, and the abiding source of supplies to all His living family, but I would like to bring before you some of those dealings of His whereby He has made it manifest to them that He is their God; that they are His people.

We have, in the life of Israel, a very lively type of what God would be to His spiritual Israel. The history of Israel at this time went backward to between four and five hundred years. God called Abraham - when he was Abram - alone, and blessed him, and entered into a Covenant with him and promised that in him should all the families of the earth be blessed. This promise was long before it had any appearance of fulfilment. Many years Abraham waited for Isaac. Then Isaac came and he, in his turn, had but two sons, one of whom the Lord hated and the other He loved. "Jacob have I loved". Jacob had twelve sons and they were sent into Egypt along with Jacob when famine came to the land of Canaan, and for 400 years these people were oppressed,

and yet, for all that, multiplied and grew exceedingly in the land of Egypt. How little this looked like all the people that should spread north, and south, and east, and west; the people in whom God would dwell, the people who should be for His own worship and service, the people in whom He would be made known. So it will be always with the living family of God. Their beginnings are small, their growth is slow, their progress seems to be always, at least very often, the wrong way, and it looks very little like a fulfilment in them of any divine purpose of life. You who have the grace of God, in whom God has manifested Himself, may often, very often feel that the promises which have been made over to you are far from being fulfilled; that the goodness you have been led to expect does not come; that the glory the Lord promised is far from you; that the growth you had at times expected through His presence, did not come. Yea, perhaps you say, it has not come as yet. If you could remember by the Holy Ghost, how the Lord delays, how wise He is in His delays, how merciful He is in His dealings, it would enable you patiently to wait for His coming, and for the fulfilment of His immutable word, for His word is immutable like Himself; it cannot be broken. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the word of God must be fulfilled. Then the Lord came - when He heard the groaning of Israel in Egypt - came down to deliver them. He delivered them by the hand of Moses; He brought them miraculously out of Egypt. And then by nature we should think would begin the praises and the steadfastness of this people; that with the glorious manifestation which they had of God's power and faithfulness to His Covenant in bringing them out of Egypt and bringing them so singularly, miraculously through the Red Sea, they would, as they began, so continue. They began to praise Him and you would think, well they have got enough now to establish them, and His high praises will be always, throughout their journey, in their mouths. But we know from the history of the people how different it was. Though they, on the banks of the Red Sea, seeing their enemies dead, praised Him, as soon as they became thirsty they murmured at Him, and the difficulties of the journey soon proved to them what was in their heart, and brought out their hypocrisy, and their weakness, their waywardness, their selfishness, and their entire want of that grace of patience, and waiting on God that is so comely. And now, as they are about to enter into the goodly land, Moses their leader and ruler, their intercessor, and God's mouth for them, relates to them

the law, gives it them the second time; tells them of their wanderings, waywardness, backslidings, murmurings; reminds them of God's chastening hand which had been upon them so often; of the solemn judgements which had visited them because of their wickedness, and tells them how that, though they were so base, and had always proved themselves to be base, yet God remembered His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In these words, these three important verses, there are many points well worthy consideration. It is said to them - "Thou shalt remember". Take it as a promise. God, the Holy Ghost, does bring to remembrance things which have been passed through, words which have been given, tokens with which the people have been blessed. He does bring things to our remembrance and good it is to have things in remembrance, that we may be humbled, that God may be exalted. If you remember how the Lord started with you, how He discovered to you His justice, and then, and thereby, your sinfulness; how He brought you down into the dust of self-abasement; caused you to perceive that if you were condemned by Him, His justice would be magnified and no injury would be done to you, no injustice inflicted upon you; if you remember this; if you remember how the Lord did teach you that you were lost, it will be useful to you from time to time. If you remember how, when you were sitting in darkness, and in the region of the shadow of death, a great light shone, and you got a view of the way of escape from the wrath to come; how Christ was in some measure made known to you as the way to the Father, the way from hell, the way from sin, the way from evil, and how, seeing Him in that light, you ran after Him in your desires; prayed, entreated, confessed, waited on Him; prostrated yourselves before Him in all humility and with desires that God would be with you, and save you; it will revive you and refresh you, and perhaps rise so high in your hearts as to enable you to say, and can He have taught me, and thus far brought me to hope in His mercy, exalted in my affections the Lord Jesus, made me see that He is to be the salvation, and all and in all to the soul, and then leave me, leave me to perish after all. It will encourage your faith, fortify your mind, and exalt God in your affections, and make you feel after all a little more in your soul of a rising hope, and a running out of desire to Him. It will be an attraction to you. "Thou shalt remember" this beginning with your deliverance from death to

sin; beginning with your deliverance from some peculiar temptation, or some dreadful bondage of spirit, or some fear, and alarm in your conscience, and then see how God wrought for you. "Thou shalt remember" that part of the way. It is not good for people as it were to leave this behind. If the beginning is not right no part can be right. If this be right it will bear looking at and the more you are enabled to reflect humbly upon what the Lord has been to you, what He has done for you from that day, it will be some encouragement.

"These forty years in the wilderness". And Moses tells them what happened to them, that is, what God did for them. "These forty years". It was a short journey, a straight way from Egypt to the land of promise, but their sin made it a long, wearisome journey, and you may find sometimes in the painful reflections that you have of your sinfulness, and turnings aside, and backslidings, explanation of God's dealing with you. Thou shalt, says Moses in this chapter, consider in thine heart that, as a father chasteneth his son, so the Lord thy God chasteneth thee. Can you, do you, sometimes look back and see how you provoked the Lord; how unworthily you walked, how carnally minded you were here and there. How sin rose up and prevailed sometimes. This remembrance has a good effect, the effect of bringing into silence that murmuring spirit that at other times rises up. Why, you may say to yourselves, instead of this moderate trouble, instead of this measured affliction, I deserve to be in hell. Instead of forty stripes save one, I deserve stripes through eternity. That will humble you, that will bring you into the dust. Nothing humbles more than two things united; remembrance of sin, and a manifestation of God's goodness to us who have sinned. How long has the Lord borne with some of us. Some of us can go back for more than 40 years as from the beginning of His good work in us, when we began to be concerned about eternity, and about Himself and about ourselves. Thou shalt remember this. Look back then. If you have got a good beginning to look back upon, when you look back you wont miss a sight of God. Your memory will, so to speak, let many things slip, but this one thing will remain in it by the grace of God, and you wont miss a sight of God. You will say, He was with me there. There He reprov'd me, there He chastened me, there I got into trouble and He helped me. There I walked into a snare with my eyes open, and yet He broke the snare and forgave the sin. There He brought me into necessity and

then opened His fullness. Thou shalt remember this. What a mercy it is to have something to look back to. And what was God's intention in all His leading of His people? Moses tells us here - "To humble thee". We need it. We need humbling. A humble person is a person who is little in his own eyes; who has nothing in his own judgement and feeling to boast of. Nothing to be a cause or reason for pride or independence. A humbled person is a person who would, and in his own spirit does, get into the dust and say - "Who am I O Lord God and what is my house that Thou hast brought me hitherto." Well, and God's dealings accomplish this; they accomplish this blessed thing that is intended - "To humble thee". To bring down thy proud heart, though it may be with labour. "To humble thee". My friends, this humility is a garment which is comely in the eyes of God. "Be clothed with humility". Pride is an abomination to Him. "He resisteth the proud". O what a mercy it is to be truly little in your own eyes, and to feel that the only One in whom you would boast and glory is the Lord Himself. As said the Psalmist - "My soul shall make her boast in the Lord. The humble shall hear thereof and be glad." "To humble thee". Yet how some of us have fretted at the things used to humble us. This wilderness, where there is no way apparently, no city to dwell in. This wilderness and the wanderings of it. "To humble thee", to bring thee to a sense of your dependence on God, and to bring thee to perceive that there is a way in Him - though not in self - a way in Him from the wrath to come. A way to a city of habitation. If we only knew this sometimes, it would stop the mouth of murmuring and break the back of pride. God has a kind intention in afflicting His people. "To humble thee". We cannot bear much. We can sing one day and fret the next. Yea, one hour we can be pleased with God, and the next most displeased with Him. O, sang Israel, "The Lord is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders," and if anybody could have suggested to them while they were singing, now in a few days you will murmur, in a few days you will begin to wish yourselves back in Egypt, what would they have said? O, they would have said, are we a dog that we should do this thing? But it came to pass. They went a little journey and they became thirsty, and there were no wells dug, and no water for them, and then they murmured. Why are we not in Egypt? What a humbling thing for these singers now to be murmurers; for those who boasted of God, now to fret against Him. Do you know the person? is he here? who has done this wicked thing. Yes, he is. O,

but the murmuring does not alter God's love. It blackens the soul, it hardens the heart, it depresses the mind when conviction of it comes, but it does not alter God's love. It does not change His purpose, it does not break His promise. O what a mercy it is so. So, instead of cutting them off, He brings them to twelve wells of water and three score and ten palm trees, and they are glad, and they are refreshed. And this is the thing to remember, how the Lord has brought us from thirst to an assuaging stream of mercy and goodness. How He has shown Himself better to us than our fears, and bigger than our highest expectations. Good is the Lord. O that we could praise Him for His goodness. "To humble thee", to bring thee to His footstool. A place most blessed - His footstool, His throne of grace where mercy is, and is dispensed. Where love divine shines forth, and where grace is reigning, and is bestowed upon beggars. "To humble thee" to bring thee here. You will never lean on God as long as you have a little bit of strength in yourself, but as soon as God takes your strength away, and brings your heart down with labour, then you will begin to look for His arm by faith, and He will manifest His arm, and then you will lean upon it.

"And to prove thee". It is a very likely thing that Israel was sincere in singing God's praises, and if anyone had said to them what hypocrisy there lies covered by this spirit of thankfulness, they would have said, O you misjudge us altogether. We are brought out of Egypt by a good God, we have been delivered from Pharaoh by a mighty hand, we have been brought into the wilderness, we are now taking our journey to the land promised to our fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and we sincerely love Him and praise Him. O, but things brought to light what was hidden. You do not know till God brings you into it, what providence may be to you as a discovery of hypocrisy. "To prove thee". O, but I am sincere. God grant that you may be, but even so you have got hypocrisy in your fallen nature, and did the Lord allow it to come out you would see it and one day perhaps you will see it, and say, Lord do not let me trust my own heart any more. Do not let me lean again to my own understanding. I perceive that I am a hypocrite by the fall, that I lean to myself more than Thyself, that I think more of myself than I think of Thee, that I love myself more than I love God. O keep me, keep me from trusting in my own heart. My dear friends, that Scripture is true, whether we know it or not - "The

heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" Not the heart of that open atheist alone, but the heart of that godly person who often gets favour, often gets near the Lord. In his heart, yes in his heart there is this fearful thing, hypocrisy.

"To prove thee and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no". Now if you have been led of God, if you have been in the way for some time, and under His teaching, and one should say, well now is it in your heart to keep God's commandment? is it in your heart to fear Him all your days? you might give a two-fold answer. You would say, well, as I look at myself as a fallen man, my answer is no. I have no heart to fear Him, I have no wish to honour Him, I have no desire, I have no power to keep His commandments. But if you are enabled to look at the inward man, the hidden man of the heart, you would say I trust that there is in me a principle to fear Him and love Him and honour Him, but by nature the answer is no. Now this may not be so manifest to some of you today as it will be later if you live. If anyone had told me more than fifty years ago that I should prove the stubborn, hypocritical, wayward, rebellious, incapable creature that I now know I am, I would not have believed them. I very likely should have been offended. But God has been pleased to take pains to show me in some measure what I am. "To prove thee and to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep His commandments, or no". You can perhaps follow the hymn in which it is as if the Lord should say

Rebellious thou hast been
And art rebellious still
But since in love I took thee in
My promise I'll fulfil

Blessed be His Name, that He is unchangeable. Change belongs to us. Hot and cold in half an hour. Loyal and rebellious; seeking God and fleeing from Him; fearing Him and daring Him; walking in humbleness of mind and stalking about in pride. O, what creatures we are, what sinners we are.

Can blood such horrid crimes atone?

It is an important question, and thank God that some of us can enter into the answer that the writer gives to his own question

Yes, blood so rich as Thine

That is our hope.

So if you look back this morning on the way you have come, I believe you will say that God has proved you, and proved you to be untrue, unfaithful, unbelieving, prayerless, ungrateful, hard. He has proved to you that He is good, and faithful, and full of love, and unchangeable in His promise to you. And these two things working in your minds will have a good effect. You will say, I hate myself, I love the Lord. You will say I deserve more infinitely than He has laid on me. He does not exact of me more than my iniquity deserves, but infinitely less, and you will say, I would, if I might, spend the rest of my days in humbly trusting Him, in fervently loving Him, in ceaselessly praising Him. How worthy He is to be praised.

"And He humbled thee and suffered thee to hunger". Humbled thee by giving thee to see what thou art, and are dependent on Him. An absolutely independent creature is an impossibility, a contradiction in terms. Independent - a man says I have made enough now to live on; I am going to retire from business. I have goods laid up for many years to come. I will take my ease, and eat, and drink, and be merry, and God may take that unbelieving, proud man at his word, yea, rather take him unawares against his word, and say to him - "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee". Independent - there is no such creature. Only one Being is independent, and that is God. On Him all people are dependent. All creatures receive being and well-being from Him. Now when it comes to His people, He brings them to this, and I am sure some of you have felt this; if you have been sweetly led into it, you have been thankful for your dependence, thankful for your emptiness. Why? Because a good, and full, and faithful God has manifested Himself to you in some measure.

"And suffered thee to hunger". It was a close place for Israel, wilderness; no bazaar, no storehouse, no bakery, no field to sow, no

seed to sow - a close place. He "suffered thee to hunger". And then we have said, we had better be in Egypt. O, if we had but been left alone. The garlicks, the onions; though we were afflicted we had plenty to eat; O if we had but been let alone. But one morning these murmurers awoke and on the ground lay a seed, something white, unusual, and they did not know what it was. They gathered some of it and took it to Moses. Said he, this is manna, this is God's bread, this is for your sustenance. He "suffered thee to hunger". And then His daily mercy, for the rest of their pilgrimage in the wilderness, this bread fell from heaven. For the time, at least, they would bless God for their hunger, that it had made way for this manifestation of His power. Every day a miracle was performed to sustain their life, and is not a miracle performed when you get a crumb of the bread of life, when a token for good comes into your heart, when a spirit of prayer is poured upon you, when a sight of the Lord Jesus is given you, when you see Him as the Mighty God, as the Intercessor who never intercedes in vain. When you see Him to be the first and the last. O what a sight it is, what a miracle it is, a sight of Christ now in heaven, given to a poor believing heart full of trouble and many fears of falling and coming short. A sight of Him again to hearten and strengthen faith, draw out hope, and warm love.

"And fed thee with manna", fed thee with the bread of God which came down from heaven, fed thee with the atonement. O, what nourishment does the blood of Christ afford to faith. Fed thee with justification. O what comfort does justification afford. It manifests God to the soul, and strengthens faith most mightily. Fed thee with the mediation of Christ, that that mediation should be your boldness at the throne of God's heavenly grace. Fed thee with the omnipotence of the Saviour, that that omnipotence should be your only support. Fed thee with a view of Jesus Christ as the wisdom of God, that you might not trust your own foolish wisdom but look to Him, and seek grace to follow Him and wait on Him. Fed thee with a view and sense of the love of Christ, that you might say to your soul in faith, O God will bless this trouble to you. God will bring you through this wilderness, God will help you out of your difficulties, God will turn all to the furtherance of the gospel in your soul. "He fed thee" And this food comes from heaven. This is the bread which came down from heaven. My brethren, our souls must have no nourishment save this.

God takes care that they shall have no nourishment but Jesus Christ. What is Christ to you? Does God feed you with Him? Does the Holy Spirit reveal Jesus Christ to you in any measure? If so, this is the bread of God, whereby your souls are nourished. Misery, and want, and bondage, and fear; sin, prevailing now and again in this and in that particular; will be the ashes we shall eat, and the gall that will be mingled with our drink. But O, Christ will change all when He comes in some touch of His love, some sweet sense of His mercy, giving some blessed view of His righteousness, of His atoning work.

"And fed thee with manna which thou knewest not" - what a good God He is, what a gracious God He is; what a loving God He has proved Himself to be to some of us - "neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live". And the point is this, that there is no life for the soul out of God. We died in Adam. We were born dead in sin and there is no life that shall be eternal and happy and blessed out of God, and this is abhorrent to our proud hearts, but welcome to faith.

"Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years." The daily manna was a daily miracle, but the continuance of their garments, their clothes not waxing old, not getting thread-bare, and of their shoes not wearing out - their sandals as new at the end as at the beginning of their wilderness journey - what an outstanding miracle was this, what a wonder. Here was one starting out of Egypt and beginning his journey through the wilderness and the robe he had when he started was as fresh at the end, just as fresh; it did not wax old; it continued. Has this any spiritual significance? I think so. Does Christ's righteousness ever get old? Does it ever wear out? No. No rough weather, no storms, no burning sun, shall ever wear out this blessed robe, the robe of Christ. It is ever new. And what about these shoes that did not wear out? Do the shoes of the preparation of the gospel ever need mending? ever wear out? No, no. The shoes of the preparation of the gospel of peace, these remain. Now, said Moses, you are to remember all this. When you come into the land of promise, when you dwell in houses you did not build, drink of wells you did not dig, eat of vineyards you did not plant, do not grow up into pride and say, my

hand hath gotten me this, and I have done this. Remember God did it all. That is the point, God did it all for you and therefore He will be praised. He will be honoured. I am satisfied of it, that if we belong to the Lord, He will take such means with us, use such discipline, train us so, chasten us, lead us so, as that we shall say, God did it. God wrought the righteousness, God gave the shoes, God rained the bread. God struck the flinty rock by the hand of Moses, and the water gushed out, and has followed us all these years. That rock was Christ, that bread was Christ. They ate of that bread, they drank of that rock, and so they lived, and so they continued. You want a new religion? You will never get it from heaven. You may spin it out of your own minds, but you will never get it from heaven. If God is with you, depend upon it, the old will be good, and God will not let you have anything better. There is nothing so good.

"These forty years in the wilderness". I have in my mind a circumstance which I feel I must just name to you. I have refrained because I do not want to distract your attention from the Lord, and His mercy to myself, yet I just want to say this, that today, to my great astonishment, I complete my forty years of service here, and O, sometimes lately, in thinking of it, I have thought of that word in Ezra where, when the foundation of the second temple was laid, the old men mourned because it was so insignificant compared with the temple that Solomon built. But the young people, who had not seen Solomon's temple, were so delighted with the foundation of this second temple that they rejoiced and shouted, and the mourning and the shouting so mingled that it was not easy to distinguish which prevailed, which was the louder, the mourning or the rejoicing. And I have felt so much sin, so many imperfections, so much unbelief, and carnality, and self, and evil within these forty years, and then, on the other hand, so much goodness, so many favours, and so many pardons, that I have not known which has been the greater, the sorrow, and shame, and confusion of face, or the thankfulness that I have felt in my heart for the Lord's goodness and mercy. You have been kind to me in bearing with me, but that is little compared with God's kindness in bearing with me all these years. I hope the little time that may be spared to me with regard to the future may be spent in His fear, and, if it please Him, in your service. I have one solemn circumstance to name to you which I learned in the vestry this morning. One who has

been worshipping with us for some time, sitting just over there by the wall, on Friday evening, sitting in his chair and quoting the second verse of that hymn of Toplady's - Rock of Ages shelter me - as soon as he had quoted that verse expired, and Mr Hayler is no more. What a solemn thing; worshipping with us so recently, and so recently speaking to one in that way, his soul fled. And if that was really his experience, what can we say but that he is absent from the body and present with the Lord.

AMEN.