

Rememebr, Remember

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[0:00] We will be mostly in Deuteronomy chapter 8, so please keep that particular chapter open before you.

! And I'm thinking of this list here of going on holiday or having a guest to stay or arranging a birthday party or extending your house. And for all of that you're having to make a plan and you've got a number of things that you need to address so you have a checklist for you.

That's all fairly straightforward and it comes and it goes and we do that every day of our lives. But there are some things which are more serious.

A major operation, some of you may have had one or you're facing that or someone you're close to is facing that.

The uncertainty of that, that is not a straightforward issue. Getting married is a massive decision to make. Your first child, life changes.

[1:11] A new job, how will it be? Losing a loved one. Those are not everyday events.

Those are events that are rich with emotion, with a sense of permanency. Life will never be the same again. And so it is that after 40 years of wandering through desert places, this people are brought to the very edge of the promised land.

And the book of Deuteronomy tells us in a series of sermons preached, given by their leader Moses, tells us how they were to address the thought that after all that wandering, those 40 years, they would actually enter this land.

How were they to go about that? What sort of checklist did they need to have? What sort of plans did they need to make? An awesome thing.

We don't really know quite what the wanderings of the desert look like. But Egypt over here, Mount Sinai, where the Ten Commandments were given, here.

[2:46] A place which was on the borders of the promised land, here. But then a lot of wandering and turning back.

And now today, somewhere in this vicinity, on the east of the River Jordan, this nation is meeting. And what a gathering.

We know from the census that was taken of the fighting men of Israel, that the nation of Israel at this time was probably one million people.

One million people who have been in this desert place for 40 years. A vast number. Deuteronomy chapter 1, verses 1 to 3.

These are the words Moses spoke to all Israel in the desert, east of the Jordan. That is, in the Araba. Opposite, Suf, between Paran and Tophel. Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab.

[3:56] And it says, almost with a sense of irony, it takes 11 days to go from Horeb to Kadesh Barnea by the Mount Seir Road.

And there is Horeb, and there is Kadesh Barnea, and it takes 11 days. But they've taken 40 years. It wasn't a long journey to go from Egypt to the Promised Land.

A matter of days. But here is the perplexity of a 40 years of wandering. And so it is, in verse 3, In the 40th year, on the first day of the 11th month, Moses proclaimed to the Israelites all that the Lord had commanded him concerning them.

And this is the book of Deuteronomy. And this is what it's about. And it's in a very well-defined geographical location and in a very clear time frame.

And what an amazing event. Moses himself spoke of this. In Deuteronomy chapter 4, verses 32 to 34.

[5:34] Do you realize just what an amazing event this is? He says to the people, Ask now about the former days, long before your time.

From the day God created, man on the earth, ask from one end of the heavens to the other, has anything so great as this ever happened?

Or has anything like it ever been heard of? Has any other people heard the voice of God speaking out of fire as you have and lived? Has any God ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?

This is a stupendous thing. This is an amazing thing, which is about to happen. And what a contrast is about to happen. We read in chapter 8 of the great land they were going into, water bubbling out of springs.

You see a bit of rock, it's got iron ore in it, or you can dig copper out of it. There's going to be abundance. You compare that with that.

[7:04] The contrast could hardly have been stronger. They've been wandering around in this desert place, and now they're going to come into a place of permanency. There are a million people. How do you sort out a nation of a million people?

How is it going to be operating? Moses' checklist could have been enormous. And indeed he does tell them many things about how it needs to be.

In fact, he repeats the things that they heard 40 years before on Mount Horeb in the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy is the second telling, the second telling of the commandments of God.

He tells them that. But I point to you today something really interesting about this book, and indeed about the way God deals with his people.

And it is that the first one-third of this book, it's 30-something chapters long, and the first 10 chapters or so are looking back.

[8:16] They're looking back. So we read in chapter 8 and verse 2, remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these 40 years.

There is stuff to be said about the future and how the future is going to be. But God says through Moses, you people need to think very, very carefully about the last 40 years.

Why is this passage important? It's important not just because it's inside our Bibles, but because we are spiritually descended from these people.

We're not genetically descended from them, but we are spiritually descended from them. The things that happen to them have a spiritual resonance with us.

It's a Bible record. There are many things that could have been written about the 40 years. But the things that have been given to us, which are recorded for us in the Bible, have a timeless relevance for us.

[9:49] In particular, it's a picture for our own lives. And in the book of Corinthians, a book which was written not to a Jewish church, but to a church of mixed ethnicity, Jew and Gentile, the Apostle Paul says to them, I don't want you to be ignorant about what happened back in those desert days.

Yes, it was 1,400 years ago, but I don't want you to be ignorant about it because what happened was like a type or an example or a picture of the things that you are going to have to go through yourself in your life.

Look at 1 Corinthians 10, verse 6. It says, Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

Verse 11, These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us. So what was happening at that stage may seem like ancient history, but actually in God's providence, it has an immediate impact and relevance for us.

And we must all say that today we face the challenge of change and the risks of the unknown. And I hope that you, like me, look at a passage like this and think, Well, what is God to say to me today for the changes and the challenges that I face?

[11:32] We're all in the same boat. We're facing particular challenges as a church at this time. We're facing the challenge of growth.

We are a growing church. The membership has doubled over the last 10 years. More people attending. We've got the challenge of children in the church.

We prayed for years that there should be more children. There are more children in the church and answer to prayer. But it's a challenge. There's a challenge of lifestyle.

And I've already referred to the fact that people have very busy lives and commitments spread large.

Being a Christian in 2016 is not the same as being a Christian in 1916. The old certainties are no longer present.

[12:39] And we need to find ways of addressing the risk and the challenge of such change. We need God's help and direction in this time of change. And I believe this passage is going to be helpful for us.

How should we remember? How should we remember? We've seen that in verse 2. Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way.

Remember. Now you might think that's very straightforward. I know about remembering. But there's actually some very bad ways and unhelpful ways of remembering the past.

And God does not want us to be stuck in those sorts of ways. Now there's a kind of a human interest way of looking at the past. Which is to pick up a book or to watch a TV program and to see someone else's life being lived out and to see the connections.

And it's interesting. It's human interest. But it doesn't really affect me. And God does not want us to be thinking about the past in that kind of way.

[13:52] Nor is the past just an entertainment or an area for nostalgia. Here's a lovely family all dressed up in 17th century clothes. And they're taking part in a reenactment.

You know the guys who rush out onto fields and have battles with each other and so forth. These are the camp followers. And they all dress up for the day. They have normal jobs Monday to Friday. And on Saturday they dress up and they do this. Maybe some of you do it. Great fun I'm sure. Maybe dangerous. But this is good nostalgia.

Nostalgia is big business in this country. The past can be entertainment. The past can be nostalgia. Nostalgia is a dangerous thing though.

Because nostalgia tends to sort of paint the past in a certain kind of way. It doesn't necessarily give the whole story. We need to be careful that we as Christian people don't look at the past in a nostalgic way.

[14:58] If you are of a certain age everything which was in the past not everything but quite a lot of it feels good. there is a danger of saying oh the old days were better days.

Our sort of compass calibration on these matters is very poor. So we are not encouraged by the Lord to be remembering the past with nostalgia.

Nor are we encouraged to remember the past just in the way of tradition. This is Lewis Bonfire. Who has been to the Lewis Bonfire Night? Right.

Okay. Some have even taken part in the Lewis Bonfire Night. It's a crazy thing that happens once a year that if you are around in the area you should go and see it once.

I don't recommend it for much longer than that. It is extremely noisy. It is dangerous. It is weird.

Here are these guys they are processing in what looks like sort of monk's clothing carrying burning crosses.

[16:15] What does that mean? I don't know. Apart from the fact that it was done the year before and the year before that. And you see there is a guy here on the right hand side.

Oh you can really just make him out can't you? He is a pirate. What is he doing there? This is Lewis.

Weird and wonderful. Thousands of people cram into the streets of Lewis on the 5th of November. Remember, remember the 5th of November gunpowder, treason and pot.

There is something way, way back about something a very serious incident when someone tried to blow up the houses of parliament in this country in 1605.

And ever since then people have remembered it on that day by bonfires and effigies and fireworks. But I suppose if I was to take a straw poll on the 5th of November in the Lewis High Street and say to people what is this about?

[17:24] Not many people would actually know. Tradition has a sad way of actually giving us bad information about the past. none of this is about what this subject matter is about.

How we should remember to remember what God wants us to see. We need to remember in such a way that we are thinking about the past in a correct way in a sober way in a deep way so that our desires our attitudes our decisions and behaviours should be deeply affected.

We need to remember so that we can live rightly. This is not fun. This is deeply serious.

This is not superficial. It's not a weekend activity. This is something which is touching the very nerves of our lives.

And God takes these first 10 chapters of Deuteronomy to say to the people I want you to think very, very carefully about what has happened in your life.

[18:51] because what has happened in your life so far is what you need to know to equip you to live your life now and in the future.

And we might put it this way because there's plenty of evidence in the Bible of people not remembering their past and forgetting their past.

And if we don't remember and act on our memory we will certainly fail or at the very least as Christian people be babies babies we will be immature we will never learn we will never grow.

So here we have this stark moment in Israel's history. God is preparing the way for them and the thing he says for them is for you to be an effective nation into your future you need to remember your past.

and we learn a very important lesson from this that as Christian people individually in order for us to have effective and fruitful futures we need to remember our past.

[20:27] To remember what God wants us to see. And what does God want us to see? Well this chapter is very plain. there are other chapters and there's more information that one could glean but here is a running theme about the things which God wants us to remember.

And there are three things and the first is that God is a God who provides. So look with me at chapter 8 verse 3. feeding you with manna which neither you nor your fathers had known.

This was a miraculous provision. You may not know what manna was. Nobody knows what manna was. But it was a miraculous provision as they were going through that desert place God sent from the sky a food that lay upon the ground.

And every day it came and every day they could pick it up and they could eat. Manna. Amazing. It didn't grow.

They didn't fertilize it. It just came to them from God. Verse 4. Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these 40 years.

[21:57] I love that picture. There were great things that God did for them. He gave them victory over their enemies. There were big battles. But the thing which Moses reminds the people of, he says, your clothes did not wear out.

Now think they're in a desert. There's no water to speak of. No water at all. Nothing to wash in.

Nothing to keep their clothes well. But God gave them clothes that didn't wear out. And Moses who was now 120 years old and was tramping around the desert with all the rest of them said in some amazement your feet did not swell.

They didn't have nice mountain boots to wear. Their feet did not swell.

There's a kind of a double mention throughout this chapter of things. So we read in verse 15 he led you through the vast and dreadful desert that thirsty and waterless land with its venomous snakes and scorpions.

[23:20] He brought you water out of the ground? No out of hard rock.

That's how amazing God's provision was for them. They look at a piece of rock that's not a place to find water.

You find water in the ground you dig a well. But God provided them with water from a rock. and he gave you manna to eat in the desert.

Wonderful. And so we have a family meal taking place here. Because God provides, doesn't he? God provides for us.

I looked on the website for family meals and they were all so happy, everybody. I tried to find something that was a little bit sort of normal because actually people don't laugh all the time at family meals.

And there's this lad here. He's looking really bored, isn't he? Which is like life.

[24:29] But every day God provides, doesn't he? Has God provided for you in your past? Yes. Has God provided for you in your past?

You're sitting here today, because anybody dare to put their hand up and say, look, I haven't felt God's provision. It's a basic fact that God looks after us.

He provides for us. Think about that. Secondly, God provides.

Secondly, God trains. The word that's used in this chapter and often in the Bible is the word discipline. So let's look at that. Verse 2, chapter 8 and verse 2.

Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these 40 years to humble you and to test you. Verse 3, he humbled you to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

[25:58] And again in verse 15. He led you. Verse 16.

He gave you manner to test you. To test you. Led, tested, taught. I wondered what sort of image to put up on the screen for this idea of God leading his people and testing them, training them.

Then I went on a long walk yesterday along the sea front. It was a beautiful day, wasn't it? And I was just encountering parent after parent with small person and I thought, that's such a great picture of the way our father looks after us.

It's not the school room. There is a place for the school room. But far better is Brighton seafront on a nice sunny afternoon. There was a dad wheeling his little lad, couple of years old, push chair. His dad said to the little lad, can you count the stones? That's a great beach of stones. And the lad goes, one, two, he didn't get further than two, I don't know how many numbers he knew.

[27:29] It reminded me of the Lord speaking to Abraham and saying, look up in the sky, can you count the stars? And there were children who were wobbling along the tops of groins and being held by anxious parents.

And there were children who were running off and the parents were running on after them. And there was a child who said, I don't want to go. And the father said, you don't want to go? That's fine. We'll stay here. And one of the dads said to his son, you're not a baby anymore, are you? And the little boy said, I'm not a baby.

You're a small boy, aren't you? I'm a small boy. And God says to us, you're not a baby anymore. You're a growing child.

All for a good purpose. God leads us, God trains us. Because he's the perfect parent, isn't he? He's the perfect parent. And so he talks with us.

[28:48] And so he holds our hand. And so he steadies us. And so he runs after us. So he calls us back. And when we have our tantrums, he's there. And how amazing is this?

If you're a parent, have ever been a parent, you'll know that you make up things as you go along. But God doesn't have to make up things as he goes along, because he has a perfect plan. He has a perfect plan.

He knows what you need. And your past is full of the perfect plan of God. Full of what he's been doing in your life.

Full of his training. Yeah, there have been some tough days. There's been glorious, sunny, sea-front-y sort of days, but there's been days of rain and gloom and difficulty, but it's all part of God's plan, all part of his purpose.

So in chapter 8, verse 3, we read, he humbled you, causing you to hunger. What an amazing father our father in heaven is.

[30:19] Because normally speaking, when a child comes and says, I'm hungry, you give them something to eat. Here's a father who makes his children hungry, who makes us hungry, and then feeds us with the manna.

father, he knows what we need. He's not too hard, he's not too soft. He is completely appropriate for us, the perfect father.

What an encouragement that should be for us today as we sit here. Are you glad that God is training you? Who else would you want to train you? Who else would you want to discipline you? No discipline, says Hebrews 12, is, for the moment, seems pleasant but grievous.

But afterwards, it yields a peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who are exercised by it. It's good news. God isn't just putting you in a pen to keep you quiet.

[31:35] He's training you to become the child of God he wants you to be. He's training you for your good. So when Rose said earlier, and I repeat, Romans 8, 28, all things work together for good to those who love the Lord, who are the called according to his purpose.

all things work together for good. Which is tough truth, but when we could embrace it, it is good truth.

Good truth. to know that all that affects our lives is under the authority of God. God's control is perfect.

There is much that we will not understand about this. Deuteronomy has a beautiful verse at the end of the book about the secret things that belong to God. But we surely have enough, we have enough evidence to say that God's control is perfect and I would not have it any other way.

He's there in the darkness as in the light. And all of that is being used to teach and to train us.

[33:13] So Moses says to the people, 40 years you've been in the wilderness. God's been with you every step of the way. He's been teaching and training you.

And God humbles. God humbles. Here's this poor girl slumped on the floor just reading her bad exam results.

Can't see her face probably on the picture there but that's what she's feeling like. The Lord led you through the desert 40 years to humble you.

To humble you. And again in verse 16. He gave you manna to eat to humble you. To humble you. is that what I need to hear if I'm going into the promised land?

Absolutely. To humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart. It's an interesting phrase.

[34:32] I don't think God needed to know what was in the people's heart. I think he could see that. he knew what they were like but they needed to see what was in their heart.

They needed to know. They needed to have memories that actually were quite painful at points when they were made to realise just the sort of people that they were.

to prove and make clear just what they were really like. So that girl is shocked because she really thought she was going to be okay.

People would say you're okay. Pass. Pass. She's failed. That's a very bad experience for any of us. Very painful experience.

Can you remember times when you failed in your life? That sort of nasty feeling in the pit of your stomach. I can remember my second year at college when I failed the exam.

[35:37] It was just so disappointing. It was just so awful. It was only a small thing in a way in the big sweep of human history that told me something. God humbles us.

These people needed to remember because they were always forgetting and they were always misreading their lives. They made no use of their history. They failed to learn the lessons.

So they say, and it's recorded, God doesn't care about us. Or, we want another plan.

We want another leader. Let's go back. And they were unwilling and they were complaining and they were fearful and they were just like us. They were just like us. And we need to use this grid, this pattern, this threefold triangle connected thoughts that God provides, God trains and God humbles as we look at our own lives.

and we have to ask those questions and to say, has God looked after me in the past? I'll make the connection.

[37:05] If God has looked after me in the past, he will look after me next week. Have I seen evidence that God has a plan for my life and has led me?

So what is God telling me about this situation that I'm in? When you're a child, you've filled in those dot-to-dot books. Have you got those dot-to-dot books?

You don't know what it is, just a load of dots, then you go one, two, three, four. Normally speaking, God is in the business of dot-to-dot. But he's saying, join up the dots.

See where things are going, see where things are heading. There's a connection. We're not in a kind of a vague place where everything is always up for grabs.

Our past is telling us something about our future because God's fingerprint is on it. We ask the question, how have I responded to challenges in the past?

[38:11] Maybe not very well. So is it wise to trust my own judgment or is it better to ask for God's help? And so families are in the business of looking at the past.

And the Hebrew scriptures are very rich on the idea of making sure your children know about the past. What does this mean? Why do we do this? I'll tell you why we do it.

Because you need to know so that you can pass it on to the next generation. And we need to know about our past collectively as a church. What stories can we tell of God's dealings with us over the past years?

What sort of collective memory do we have? How many of you were regularly attending this church five years ago? So for the benefit of those who aren't up the front and who are listening to us on tape, just put your hands up high because I can't really see that.

So we've got a room full of about 55-60 people here and I would say that that is reflecting maybe a third. Maybe a third.

[39:28] How many people were attending this church 10 years ago regularly? Okay, understandably the numbers have dropped off. So we're down to about 15%.

How many were here attending regularly 20 years ago? It's the same one. Some people. How many were here 1,000 years ago? 20 years is a generation.

It's a generation. Most of you have no personal knowledge of that past generation.

Do you know that 10 years ago, just about 10 years ago, we weren't even meeting in this place here. We were meeting next door in the back hall.

There was a hole in the roof. There was a hole in the roof. The place was full of stuff. Hadn't been used for a while there. So it seems quite normal that we should be meeting here, but actually it wasn't normal.

[40:31] It wasn't the way. Has anybody told you that? I think we need to have a Sunday morning when we actually tell the past.

Tell the past in as vivid and helpful ways we can. So I tell you about Mrs. George Gates. I tell you about this guy, Mr. Purser here, who was a very faithful Sunday school teacher over many years, and there are several other plaques in the building.

We keep them not for nostalgia's sake, but we keep them because they have something to tell us important about the way that God has led this church. Something about the greatness of God, God's provision, God's training, and God's humbling.

And if we were brave, we might talk a little bit about God's humbling. And we might say, we didn't handle that very well, but God still was gracious and kind.

And we will learn a lesson. what God has done for us and to us, what he has shown us is what we need to know about as we face the future.

[41:45] It is not just the question of what we actually do, but the way that we go about it. So we have been extremely careful, and I hope, have humbled ourselves before God in the matter of appointing deacons.

and we're being extremely careful, and may God give us grace in this, in the matter of assistant pastor, because it's not just a question of somebody coming along and being the person, but how we go about it, and how we depend on God, and how we see and acknowledge that God provides. time is really gone, but I'm very conscious, there's almost a separate sermon here, that I want to just, I just want to alert you to something in this chapter.

I don't know whether you picked it up, but at the very end of the chapter, there's a rather depressing moment, where Moses said, if you ever forget the Lord your God, and follow other gods and worship and bow down to them, I testify against you today, that you will surely be destroyed, like the

nations the Lord destroyed before you, so you will be destroyed for not obeying the Lord your God. He's talking to his own children, and he's saying, you will be destroyed if you forget. This was not an idle threat.

[43:25] This was a reality, and they knew it was a reality, because all the generation that came out of Egypt died in the desert, and it was the judgment of God.

even Moses, their great leader, would not go into the promised land, because God said, you sinned, you're going to die in the desert.

Only two people out of that original group actually went into the promised land, and not because they didn't sin, it's because God was merciful. So if I'd been one of those million people on the verge of Jordan, and I look back over those 40 years, and I'd seen how often the people had failed, and how often God had judged, and the plagues that had come, and the defeats that they'd experienced, I think I would have been very nervous, because if they knew anything about their own hearts, they would say, I can't do this, I can't not forget the Lord, I'm not a good person for keeping the memory of the past, I know what it is to have failed, and God said to every one of them, he had his finger on them, and every single one of them, and said, you're failures, you've failed.

So fast forward, beyond the point that Phil has been looking at in Kings, fast forward, 800 years, when Israel, part of the country, has been taken off into captivity, and all that's left is little Judah, and Jeremiah the prophet is raised up, and he speaks to the people, and they don't want to listen, because they've forgotten God, and he says very poignantly, or rather God says through him in Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 9, he says, the human heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked, who can cure it?

You've had centuries now, of being able to prove to yourself, that your heart is hard, that you turn away from God, you never learn the lessons, there's a fatal flaw, somewhere in this chapter there's a fatal flaw, and it's not to do with God, but it's to do with us, it's the problem of the heart, and that's the verse we've just been quoting, but it was given to Jeremiah also to say, this is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah after that time, declares the Lord, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts, it won't be out there, it'll be in here, they won't be unwilling, they'll be willing, and it was a lovely thing that Jeremiah was given a sight of that possibility, wasn't it lovely?

[46:41] Because he lived in hard days, and days after he says something like that, the whole of the rest of the nation is taken into captivity and it looks like disaster, it looks like they're destroyed, it looks like the thing that God has said would happen actually does, no more.

So I take you to another desert, and it's now 1,500 years later than the time of Moses, and there's not a nation out on that desert, but there's one man tested for 40 days, trusting in God's provision, embracing God's will and purpose, and showing a pure and obedient heart towards God.

His name is Jesus. He does what they couldn't do. And there's a garden where this same man in anguish, in anticipation of an awful death the following day, he trusts in God's provision, he embraces God's will and purpose, and he shows a pure and obedient heart towards God, unlike the people he represented.

And there's a cross, and he goes to that cross, trusting in God's provision, embracing God's will and purpose, and showing a pure and obedient heart towards God.

So that Paul, his follower, says later, in being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. And so in Romans, the later book, for what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.

[48:44] And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us.

And brothers and sisters, this changes everything. This changes everything, doesn't it? we cannot keep the law of God but he has done it for us.

We deserve the judgment of God for our disobedience but he has borne that on the cross. And as we put our trust in who Jesus is and what Jesus did, this passage, which seems to have warning and foreboding built into it, is transformed into one of encouragement and hope and confidence. Praise be to God for his indescribable gift of the Lord Jesus, the perfect man, the sin bearer, our saviour.

Amen. We're going to sing number 769, We trust in you, our shield and