

"REMEMBER, AND DO NOT FORGET"

by

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Hosea 12:13 says, "By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved." Today we want to look at a part of the experience of Moses, the prophet the Lord used to bring His people out of Egypt, and hear his counsel at the end of his life. Then we will look briefly at another prophet by whom God led and preserved His people.

It was the eleventh month of the 40th year of the people of Israel's pilgrimage through the wilderness. They were camped in a valley on the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River (Deut. 1:1). Jericho was on the other side of the river.

There, at the border of the Promised Land, Moses, the great leader, was coming to the end of his life, for God had told him that he would not enter the land that it had taken so long to reach. But Moses was not resigned to his fate. He begged God to let him have the joy of stepping onto the land of his dreams. But God reaffirmed His decision not to let him in.

The message was loud and clear: "Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter. Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan" (Deut. 3:26-28).

What a terrible blow this was to Moses! It seemed to him like a great injustice. He had renounced the world of comfort, luxury, and power in Egypt, and had sacrificed everything, believing in the God of his fathers. He had left everything in order to fulfill a mission. He had dreamed of settling in the Promised Land, but now, because of his sin, all his hopes were dashed.

How many times do we think that God is unfair with us, and like Moses we cling to our dreams and desires, and we forget that God has a better dream and a bigger plan, immeasurably greater than what we crave? Perhaps we do not understand now, but we have to learn to live by faith, we have to learn to trust God, for what Satan has brought on us for evil, God will turn for good, far above what we even imagine.

Yes, Moses died there, at the border of the Promised Land (Deut. 34: 1-5), but He was resurrected, even if Satan fought to keep him (Jude 9). Hundreds of years later he appeared with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration to accompany Jesus and encourage Him in His work of redemption (Matt. 17:3). So, instead of living a few years in the promised land, Moses now lives forever in the kingdom of God, symbolizing those who died and will be raised at the coming of Jesus to receive eternal life.

DEUTERONOMY, MOSES' MEMORIES

There on the borders of the Promised Land, Moses wrote and delivered speeches that comprise the bulk of the book of Deuteronomy, which means "repetition of the law," or second legislation.

Like an old general writing his memoirs, the great leader and prophet recalls and reviews the most important incidents of the long pilgrimage to the land of the promise. So the book of Deuteronomy reminds us of the fascinating history of how the Hebrew people came out of slavery and were guided through the desert amid wonderful manifestations of God's power. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the history of the Israelite people came to Moses' memory as in a film.

In reading the Book of Deuteronomy, we can think of at least two reasons why it was written:

First, the generation that came out of Egypt had died, and a new generation needed not only to know the history, but to experience the presence of God in their lives. In this way, under the direction of God and His prophets, they would face their future with success.

Second, Romans 15:4 tells us, "For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope." The experiences of Israel speak to us today, warning, guiding, encouraging us to follow in the ways of God.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we also have been rescued from the bondage of "Babylon," the confusion of sin, and we are traveling through the desert of life to the heavenly Canaan. We need the guidance of the Word of God, through his prophets. Hence, the importance of the Book of books, the Word of God, where we can learn to be guided and not make the same mistakes that prevented Moses and many of the Israelites from entering Canaan, and would prevent us from entering the country that Jesus went to prepare for us (John 14:1-3).

REMEMBER, AND DO NOT FORGET

Since the history of Israel is largely parallel to our history, it is appropriate that we pause for a moment today and meditate on a portion of the book of Deuteronomy, because God has a message for us as we move forward in our journey to the Promised Land.

I invite you to read Deuteronomy chapter 8, verses 1 through 3: "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 of which the Lord swore to your fathers. 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, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord."

Here we find some things that are vital to our spiritual experience:

First, we see that God invites us to obey His commandments. Some see God as stern and hard, demanding worship, submission, and obedience in order to satisfy Himself. Nothing could be farther from reality. God is God, and He does not need any of us in order for Him to be God. We are the ones who need Him. When He invites us to obey and worship Him, it is because He knows us, and He knows that in order to be happy, to have peace, security, and hope, we must seek Him. We need to worship Him for our own sake and happiness, not for His. God needs nothing from us; we need all from Him. He is the Owner and Creator of the whole universe (Ps. 24:1).

Next, we notice that the second part of Deuteronomy 8:1 states three things that happen when we are faithful and loyal to God. He says, "That you may LIVE and MULTIPLY," and "go in and POSSESS the land."

Let's look at each one of these blessings:

"THAT YOU MAY LIVE"

Our greatest desire as human beings is to live, to be healthy, to prolong our days on earth. No person who has health and a sound mind is thinking about dying. We all want to live and be happy. Every day more and more treatments are marketed to help people stay young, to be healthier. A while ago a pastor was visiting homes in a certain part of the city to share words of hope with people, praying with them and also inviting them to study the Bible. In one of the homes that he visited, a kind elderly lady invited him in. She was 89 years old, and after a bit of conversation, she began to complain about how hard life was for her. She mentioned that she had trouble with her stomach, with her bones, her head, lack of sleep, and so on. Trying to encourage her, the pastor told her that in this world we have to face all kinds of challenges, but God has the solution for all bad things. Even if she has to die, if she believes in Jesus, when He returns to earth she will rise again. So he told her not to worry. The lady replied, "Who says that I want to die?" She was complaining of the difficult life she had, but she was not hoping to die. And this is not surprising, because human beings were created not to die but to live. That's what God put in our hearts. Jesus himself said: "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). The best recipe that we have in order to live is the one we find in His Word. God has spoken through the prophets and through the Spirit of Prophecy. So, if we read and follow His plan for us, we can live, and live abundantly, and at the same time be ready for eternal life.

"AND MULTIPLY"

From the beginning of the creation of this world, God gave us the privilege to multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it (Genesis 1:28). Human beings want not only to live longer but also to multiply and be extended through their offspring. This too is a noble desire in the human heart. What a joy to find the woman or man with whom we are going to live together in holy matrimony, as God commanded, and form a new household. In most cases, this leads to seeing our children—and our children's children—born, grow, develop, and enjoy life, being useful in service to humanity, while enjoying their families. This adds to the joy of

walking in this world with security, health, and peace of mind as we prepare also to go to our eternal Home, the kingdom of heaven.

But as Christians, we want not just to multiply physically, but also spiritually. While we experience the joy of relating to God ourselves and moving forward in the knowledge of His love, we also share with others the blessed hope of salvation. This happens when we are faithful to His Word. That is why the Apostle Paul says, "the love of Christ compels us" (2 Cor. 5:14) or drives us, motivating us to share and serve.

"GO IN AND POSSESS THE LAND"

God promised the people of Israel that they were going to take possession of a wonderful land. He had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt, to bring them to that place that He intended for them. In that same chapter of Deuteronomy, God, through Moses, described the land He had promised them: "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. When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land which He has given you" (Deut. 8:7-10). It is also described as "a land flowing with milk and honey" (Deut. 6:3). But to have all this wealth, the condition was the same: faithfulness to God, his principles, his Word—for the people's own good, not for the sake of God. In the land, they would have roots, identity, and a sense of belonging.

In Deuteronomy 8:2 God presents a mental mechanism by which He gives certainty and affirms the security of His presence in our lives. The Word says, "You shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you." After these words Moses invited them to review the wonders that God made before them in the wilderness: God "fed you with manna. . . . Your garments did not wear out on you, neither did your foot swell these forty years" (8:3, 4).

"Remember, and do not forget." The idea is repeated again and again. In fact, we may define the message of this book with this sentence: Remember, and do not forget. Note the emphasis: "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God" (8:11). "When your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt" (8:14). "And you shall remember the Lord your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (8:18). "If you by any means forget the Lord your God, . . . you shall surely perish" (8:19). "Remember! Do not forget" (9:7).

THE SAME MESSAGE FOR US TODAY

The message for the people of Israel is also for us. We're going to the Promised Land, our heavenly home that Jesus has prepared for us. How important it is to remember who we are, where we are coming from, why we are here, where we are going, and to Whom we belong! How good it is, both spiritually and psychologically, to remember the good things of life, the wonderful

moments when we saw God's hand working in a special way in our favor. Even if we walk in moments of anguish, pain, or suffering, or perhaps even in the valley of the shadow of death, or if we are simply discouraged on our way to the promised land—when we remember, God gives us assurance that He is in control of our lives, if we are faithful to His instructions, faithful to His Word. Ellen G. White tells us about the importance of remembering the Lord's care for us. She says: "When temptations assail you, when care, perplexity, and darkness seem to surround your soul, look to the place where you last saw the light. Rest in Christ's love and under His protecting care. When sin struggles for the mastery in the heart, when guilt oppresses the soul and burdens the conscience, when unbelief clouds the mind, remember that Christ's grace is sufficient to subdue sin and banish the darkness. Entering into communion with the Saviour, we enter the region of peace" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 250).

And Sister White has still another positive affirmation:

"In reviewing our past history, having traveled over every step of advance to our present standing, I can say, Praise God! As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment and with confidence in Christ as Leader. We have nothing to fear for the future, except, as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history. We are now a strong people, if we will put our trust in the Lord; for we are handling the mighty truths of the word of God. We have everything to be thankful for."—*General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 24 (also in *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White*, p. 196, and *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 31).

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

Speaking of the people of Israel and their journey to the Promised Land, the Lord says, "By a prophet the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved" (Hosea 12:13).

Like the people of Israel, today we still have the prophets in the Holy Bible, and also we have the wonderful "lesser light," the Spirit of Prophecy expressed in the writings of Sister Ellen G. White. As Moses and the other prophets guided the people of Israel, the visions of Ellen White have guided us in our journey toward the Promised Land. At the beginning, her visions gave us assurance that despite the fact that Jesus had not come as the believers expected in 1844, His promise had not failed. In Scripture, then, we found out about His ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, which had begun at the time of the Disappointment. The visions helped us begin publishing in 1849 and overcome our reluctance to organization in the 1850s and 1860s. They gave us important health instruction in 1863 and beyond. In the 1870s they encouraged us to establish schools, and in the decades following they gave important instruction for those schools.

The visions also urged us to enter mission lands, beginning with J. N. Andrews, our first missionary to Europe, in 1874. They helped to refocus our message on Jesus and His righteousness in the years leading up to 1888, and in the years following, books by Ellen White such as *Steps to Christ* and *The Desire of Ages* were published. They have pointed people to Jesus and have changed lives for more than 100 years. Counsels from Ellen G. White helped us to

reorganize for effective service in 1901, and they kept us from following Dr. J. H. Kellogg into theological speculations and error in the early 1900s. Her five-volume "Conflict of the Ages" series has opened the minds of so many people to the "great controversy" between Christ and Satan, how evil arose and why it is here, and how God will solve the problem for eternity. Her writings have blessed this church, and its individual members, in so many ways and at such depth. Without those writings, we would certainly have gone astray onto many side roads that do not lead to the Kingdom.

In the greater light, the Bible, and in the lesser light we have so many blessings, instructions, and counsels that will help us not to make the same mistakes that Israel did. For our own sake, we need to pay attention to the instructions and guidance we have in the Bible and these special writings.

Today, we celebrate the wonderful gift that we as a Church have received: according to Revelation 12:17 and 19:10, the Spirit of Prophecy. Let's praise the Lord for that privilege we have. Let's take time every day to read and study the Bible and these wonderful books, as we continue our journey to the Promised Land. We are just at the border. Let's be faithful.

"REMEMBER, AND DO NOT FORGET."

Would you like to join me in dedicating or rededicating our lives to God today?