

“BEWARE LEST THOU FORGET”

OT LESSON #17

by Ted Gibbons

INTRODUCTION: Throughout history the people of God have suffered from bad memories. Our recollection of the most amazing blessings will disappear from our memories if we are not attentive. Moses had seen this reality in his people a lot of times. They had memory spans roughly equivalent to a box of corn flakes. Miracles and divine demonstrations were forgotten more quickly than the IRS’s phone number. Much of Deuteronomy was given and written to help the covenant people remember the important things.

When you look in the dictionary for the most important word, do you know what it is? It could be *remember*. Because all of you have made covenants—you know what to do and you know how to do it—our greatest need is to remember. That is why everyone goes to sacrament meeting every Sabbath day—to take the sacrament and listen to the priests pray “that they may always remember him and keep his commandments which he has given them.” Nobody should ever forget to go to sacrament meeting. Remember is the word. Remember is the program (Elder Spencer W. Kimball, Charge to Religious Educators, pp. 9-12).

Forgetting is most likely to occur when things are going well. Mormon, after abridging eleven apostasy-filled chapters of Helaman, said this:

Yea, and we may see at the very time when he doth prosper his people, yea, in the increase of their fields, their flocks and their herds, and in gold, and in silver, and in all manner of precious things of every kind and art; sparing their lives, and delivering them out of the hands of their enemies; softening the hearts of their enemies that they should not declare wars against them; yea, and in fine, doing all things for the welfare and happiness of his people; yea, *then is the time that they do harden their hearts, and do forget the Lord their God*, and do trample under their feet the Holy One—yea, and this because of their ease, and their exceedingly great prosperity (Hel.

12:2, emphasis added).

1. MOSES GIVES INSTRUCTIONS TO THE ISRAELITES TO HELP THEM REMEMBER THEIR COVENANTS.

Joseph and Sidney reported a vision of Lucifer. After describing his fall and rebellion they recorded that “he maketh war with the saints of God, and encompasseth them round about” (D&C 76:29). Revelation 12:9 and 13:7 both affirm the reality of this war. In addition, the book of Revelation describes Satan in a most interesting way:

And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads (Rev.12:3).

This dragon—this image of Lucifer—is more than a symbol. It is a testimony to the variety of ways in which Lucifer can and will make war as he surrounds us. Just when we think we are safe because we have used the Sword of truth to lop one of plights to get us to forget, he comes at us from another direction. To overcome this effort, what does the Lord command us to do?

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates (Deut 6:6-9).

Read these verses carefully and mark *what* we are supposed to do and *when and where* we are supposed to do it.

If we surround ourselves with the messages of the scriptures and the power of the word of God, then his words will be in our hearts and we will be empowered to remember and resist.

What programs has the Lord given us to help us keep his instruction about his

words? Can you see how Sunday School and Family Home Evening and Family and Personal Scripture Study and Seminary and Institute assist in this matter? Notice what will happen if we keep this counsel:

Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law. For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it (Deut. 32:46,47).

The phrase “it is your life” is a reference to Moses’s teachings in Deut. 30:

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life . . . (vss. 19,20).

We are encouraged to choose life, the life that comes from obedience, from loving and obeying and cleaving to Jesus Christ, “for he is [our] life.”

What will happen to us if we neglect the words of protection and instruction while we are surrounded by an enemy? Even if we erect a great wall of protection to shield ourselves and our families from the seven-headed dragon, but leave one section of the wall uncompleted—for example, the *clean thoughts* section or the *scripture study* section or the *personal prayer* section or the *Family Home Evening* section—what will happen? We have been reminded in Ephesians 6 and D&C 27 to put on the *full* armor of God.

In Deuteronomy 6:8 we are told to *bind* the words to ourselves. What does the word “bind” mean? What does it imply? In that same verse we are instructed to let the words of the Lord be as “frontlets between” our eyes. What word does Exodus 13:9 use instead of *frontlets*? Memorials have just one purpose: to help us remember.

Where are we to write these words according to Deut. 6:9? Why would the Lord want Israel to write these words in such places? King Benjamin taught his

children that we should have the “commandments always before our eyes” (Mosiah 1:5) When you are in your home, what things are always before your eyes. What videos are on your shelves. What pictures and books and magazines? Are the things that are before your eyes in your home memorials of your relationship with the Lord of symbolic of your longing for the world?

Finally, men captained by Christ will be consumed in Christ Enter their homes, and the pictures on their walls, the books on their shelves, the music in the air, their words and acts reveal them as Christians (Ezra Taft Benson, “Born of God,” Ensign, Nov. 1985, 6,7).

President Hunter suggested a particular kind of picture on the walls of our homes.

Let us be a temple-attending people. Attend the temple as frequently as personal circumstances allow. Keep a picture of a temple in your home that your children may see it (Howard W. Hunter, “Exceeding Great and Precious Promises,” Ensign, Nov. 1994, 8).

2. MOSES COUNSELS THE ISRAELITES TO OBEY GODS COMMANDMENTS AND REMEMBER HIM.

Moses anticipated prosperity for his people in the Land of Promise. He described it as a land of

great and goodly cities, which thou buildedst not, And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive trees, which thou plantedst not . . . (Deut. 6:10,11).

But he also knew that such prosperity could lead to danger:

Then beware lest thou forget the LORD, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage (Deut. 6:12)

In Deuteronomy 8, the Lord defines the danger with great clarity:

For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of

brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any [thing] in it; a land whose stones [are] iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass. When thou hast eaten and art full, then thou shalt bless the LORD thy God for the good land which he hath given thee. Beware that thou forget not the LORD thy God, in not keeping his commandments, and his judgments, and his statutes, which I command thee this day: Lest [when] thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built goodly houses, and dwelt [therein]; And [when] thy herds and thy flocks multiply, and thy silver and thy gold is multiplied, and all that thou hast is multiplied; Then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the LORD thy God, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage . . . (Deut. 8:7-14; see also 4:9,23).

The Lord seems concerned that wealth will increase the probability of forgetfulness. If that was true in the days of Moses, might it not also be true in our day?

What are people inclined to do when they are richly blessed?

And thou say in thine heart, My power and the might of [mine] hand hath gotten me this wealth (Deut 8:17)

In the midst of the depression, Melvin J, Ballard warned of this danger. He said:

We are in the age of self-indulgence. It is not peculiar to this Church; it is in the world. The spirit of it is rampant everywhere. It beats upon our shores from all points. It enters into the midst of the people. It is a deadly siege in an attempt to destroy that which persecution, mob violence, privation and hardship failed to destroy,—the integrity of this people. I am not a pessimist either. While I recognize the storms that are raging against our standards, I am as sure as that I live that the promises of the Lord will be fulfilled, and that this work shall not fail, nor shall it be given to another people. I recognize however,

with my brethren, that the sorest trials that have ever come to the Church in any age of the world are the trials of peace and prosperity. But we are to do a new thing, a thing that never has before been done—We are to take the Church of Christ not only through the age of persecution and mob violence, but through the age of peace and prosperity. For we must learn to endure faithfully even in peace and prosperity.

I am not praying for the return of persecution and poverty; I am praying for peace and prosperity; but above all things for strength and power to endure this test. For it was not the design and the intention of the Lord to have this people always in suffering in bondage and distress. They shall come to peace and prosperity, but it is the sorest trial that will come to them (Elder Melvin J. Ballard, April 1929 Conference Report, p. 66).

Brigham Young said,

The worst fear that I have about this people is that they will get rich in this country, forget God and His people, wax fat, and kick themselves out of the Church and go to hell. This people will stand mobbing, robbing, poverty, and all manner of persecution, and be true. But my greatest fear for them is that they cannot stand wealth; and yet they have to be tried with riches, for they will become the richest people on this earth." (Reported in James S. Brown, *Life of a Pioneer*, pp. 122-23 [1900]; quoted in Bryant S. Hinckley, *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1956], p. 13.)

There are at least two reasons why God allows his people to become rich in spite of the great dangers. One is found in Helaman 12:, the other in Deuteronomy 8:18.

. . . we can see that the Lord in his *great infinite goodness* doth bless and prosper those who put their trust in him (Hel. 12:2, emphasis added).

But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for [it is] he that giveth thee power to get wealth, *that he may establish his covenant* which

he swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day (Deut. 8:18, emphasis added)

3. MOSES COUNSELS THE ISRAELITES TO BE MINDFUL OF THE ROCK OF THEIR SALVATION (JESUS CHRIST).

My kids can talk me into almost anything. I am patient almost to the point of paralysis. They sometimes call me a marshmallow. Other times they call me a Teddy Bear. What do those terms suggest about my character (never mind my shape and weight)? What ought we to learn from the following descriptions of the Savior?

(1) He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he. (Deut. 32:4)

(2) But Jeshurun [*i.e.* the upright and righteous] waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation (Deut. 32:15).

(3) Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee (Deut. 32:18).

(4) How should one chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight, except their Rock had sold them, and the LORD had shut them up? (Deut. 32:30).

(5) For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges (Deut. 32:31).

I have a mountain close by my home: Mount Timpanogos. It is mostly made of rock. It is always there. Unless, according to the will of God, someone uses tremendous faith, it will always be there. I have faith in its presence and stability. I know where it stands and what it looks like and how it affects the winds and the clouds and the sunrise. It is inconceivable that I would awaken some morning and find it moved or reshaped. It is in that sense that I think Christ is referred to as a Rock. He is referred to in the scriptures as being "unchangeable." (See Mormon

9:19; Moroni 8:18; D&C 20:17). He is represented as being "everlasting." (See Genesis 21:33; Isaiah 9:6; Isaiah 40:28). He is described as being "eternal" (see 1 Tim. 1:17; Title Page of the Book of Mormon; I N 11:21; 1 N 12:18).

CONCLUSION: Nothing else is as reliable as our God. Not our homes, cars, bank accounts, or hair lines. This is the thing we must remember. He is unchangeable, everlasting, and eternal. It is on the foundation of his certainty that we must build our lives. You cannot know where you will be in a week, or where your job will be or where your friends will be or where your health will be. But you know where God will be. He is a Rock!

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