

Deuteronomy 8:3

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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 only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.

Analysis

This verse contains one of Scripture's most profound statements about human sustenance and divine provision. The Hebrew construction emphasizes God's deliberate pedagogy: *vay'anekha vayar'ivekha* (וַיַּעֲנֵךְ וַיַּעֲבֹךְ) 'He humbled you and allowed you to hunger'). God orchestrated Israel's hunger to create dependence and teach a crucial lesson. The provision of man (מן, manna)—food unknown to Israel or their ancestors—demonstrated God's ability to sustain life through means beyond natural agriculture or human provision.

The theological heart is the purpose clause: *lema'an hodia'kha ki lo al-halechem levaddo yichyeh ha'adam* (לְמַעַן הָזִיכָּר כִּי לֹא עַל-פְּלַקְמָן לְבָדָן יְחִי הָאָדָם) 'in order to make you know that not by bread alone does man live'). The Hebrew lechem represents all physical provision, while adam (אָדָם) denotes humanity universally, not just Israel. The positive statement follows: *ki al-kol-motsa fi-YHWH yichyeh ha'adam* (כִּי אֶל-כָּל-מוֹצָא פִּי-יְהָה יְחִי הָאָדָם) 'but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD does man live').

Jesus quoted this verse when tempted by Satan to turn stones to bread (Matthew 4:4), demonstrating that even legitimate physical needs must not override obedience to God's Word. The principle transcends mere physical survival—true

life (spiritual, eternal, abundant) comes through God's revelation, not merely material sustenance. This anticipates John 6:35 where Jesus declares Himself the 'bread of life.'

Historical Context

This verse reflects on the wilderness experience (1446-1406 BC) when Israel wandered forty years before entering Canaan. After the exodus, Israel quickly faced food scarcity in the wilderness of Sin (Exodus 16). God provided manna—a substance appearing each morning except Sabbath, sufficient for daily needs but spoiling if hoarded (except before Sabbath). This daily provision required trust, preventing self-sufficiency and enforcing dependence on God.

The manna's mysterious nature—"bread from heaven" (Exodus 16:4)—defied natural explanation. Its sweetness (Exodus 16:31), nutritional adequacy for forty years, and supernatural provision patterns taught Israel that God's word creates and sustains reality. When manna ceased upon entering Canaan (Joshua 5:12), Israel learned that God provides through different means in different seasons, yet remains the ultimate source.

Moses delivered Deuteronomy's retrospective analysis as Israel prepared for agricultural life requiring human labor for food production. The danger was forgetting God's provision and attributing success to personal effort (Deuteronomy 8:17). Jesus' use of this verse in His temptation shows its enduring relevance—even the Son of God submitted to this principle, refusing to use divine power for personal convenience apart from the Father's will.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. How does God sometimes orchestrate circumstances that humble us and create dependence on Him?
2. What does it mean practically that man lives by every word proceeding from God's mouth?
3. How can we guard against self-sufficiency when we have material abundance?
4. In what ways does Jesus fulfill the principle that God's Word is essential for true life?
5. How should this verse shape our priorities when physical needs seem to conflict with spiritual obedience?

Interlinear Text

וַיַּעֲבֹר	וְרָעָב	בְּמַן	אֶת	וְאָכַלְתָּ	בְּמַן	אֶת	וְאָכַלְתָּ	בְּמַן
And he humbled	thee and suffered thee to hunger		and fed		thee with manna			
H6031	H7456		H398	H853				H4478
לֹא	אָשָׁר	לֹמֶן	עַנְנָה	אָבֹתֶת	יְבָשָׁה	לֹמֶן	עַנְנָה	אָבֹתֶת
H834	H3808	know	H3808	know	not neither did thy fathers	H4616		
		H3045		H3045	H1			
בְּלֹא	כִּי	כִּי	לֹבֶדֶן	לֹבֶדֶן	לֹבֶדֶן	כִּי	בָּאָדָם	בָּאָדָם
know	H3588	H3808	H5921	by bread	only	doth not live	doth man	H3588
H3045				H3899	H905	H2421	H120	
כְּלֹא	מָזַח	אָמֵן	פִּי	הַלְלוּ	הַלְלוּ	הַלְלוּ	בָּאָדָם	בָּאָדָם
H5921	H3605	but by every word that proceedeth	H4161	out of the mouth	H6310	of the LORD	H3068	
בָּאָדָם	בָּאָדָם							
doth not live	doth man							
H2421	H120							

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 4:4 (Word): But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.

Luke 4:4 (Word): And Jesus answered him, saying, It is written, That man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God.

Psalms 37:3 (References Lord): Trust in the LORD, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.

1 Corinthians 10:3 (Parallel theme): And did all eat the same spiritual meat;

Psalms 105:40 (Parallel theme): The people asked, and he brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of heaven.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org