

'as thy days, so thy strength'

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[0 : 0 0] In chapter 33 of Deuteronomy, we read in verses 24 and 25, and of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children, let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil.

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be. And as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

Asher is, of course, one of the tribes being blessed here by Moses at the end of his life and ministry. And there's differences, of course, between the blessing of the individual patriarchs that we see at the end of Genesis 49, compared to how we now see the blessing of the tribes in Deuteronomy 33.

But I want us to recognise what we find particularly here in verse 25. As thy days, so shall thy strength be. Now, the context here, of course, is Moses giving this parting blessing.

This is the blessing, verse 1, where Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death. He said, The Lord came from Sinai and rose up from Seir unto them.

[1 : 1 5] He shined forth from Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints. From his right hand went a fiery law for them. Now, things we should recognise here, of course.

One is that the Lord has himself chosen out his people and given them the law. When he appears in power, when he comes, as it were, from Sinai, comes with ten thousands of his saints.

In other words, the heavenly host there. From his right hand, that is the hand that is always associated with honour and associated with power. From his right hand went a fiery law.

Now, the Hebrew original translation would be literally a fire of law. Now, different ways in which we might recognise the law to be fiery.

One is, of course, that it is given in a context of fire. I remember when the Lord gave it in Deuteronomy 4, chapter 4, verse 33.

[2 : 1 4] It said, Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as thou hast heard, and live? In other words, when the law is given on Sinai, there was fire and smoke and darkness and so on in the mount.

It was a fiery experience. It is therefore described as a fiery law. A fire of law in the literal Hebrew. But also, the sense that we have to recognise not only the power and the dreadfulness of fire, but also what it is partly for.

And we have a reminder of this in the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi, chapter 3, verses 2 and 3. So, of course, Levi was the priestly tribe.

And that which Levi offered in righteousness was being offered on behalf of all the children of Israel. So, that which is offered for all the children of Israel was to be purified.

And this is part of the purpose of the law. It is to purify the children of Israel, to guide and direct their steps, to direct them ultimately to their need of a Messiah, of a Redeemer.

[3 : 45] The law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ. But also, we should recognise that whilst the law is sometimes thought of in negative terms, in terms of punishment, in terms of thou shalt not, in terms of restriction, remember what it says here.

There went a fiery law for them. It doesn't just mean this is delivered to them, but for them. God is for his people.

This is one of the things we have brought out of the prophet Ezekiel, you know, where he's speaking about the mountains of Israel and the bringing forth of men and flocks and herds. For God is for you, he said.

The Lord is not against his people. He is not trying to catch them out. He's not trying to visit upon them a means of their destruction. The law, although it is a judgment upon sin, it is, in a sense, a destructive thing.

Because if we're judged by the law, we're all lost. But the law is intended for good. The law is intended for blessing. Paul tells us the law is spiritual.

[4 : 48] The law is good and holy and just. This is a law, however fearful in its giving, the fiery law. It is for them.

Not merely to them, but it is for them. Yea, he loved the people. All his saints are in thy hand.

The Lord's people are in the palm of his hand. This is what we read in John 10. Jesus says, verse 28, I have given to them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father which gave them me is greater than all, and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand.

And what Jesus says in the Gospel is already being given here way back in the law, in the Old Testament. He loved the people. All his saints are in thy hand.

[5 : 45] None shall pluck them out of his hand. None shall pluck them out of his Father's hand. As Jesus says in the very next verse, they enjoy death. I and my Father are one. And they sat down at thy feet.

Every one shall receive of thy words. Now, we like to think, oh, we all like to think we do that, but of course the number of people that actually are described as doing that is comparatively few.

And Mary of Bethany is an outstanding example, where of course we read precisely this over. Verse 39 of Luke 10, where we read, She had a sister, Mark, and a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet and heard his word.

She sat at his feet and heard his word. And we read here, They sat down at thy feet. Every one shall receive of thy words.

That which mainly personifies the Lord's people are told that they shall in the foos of time indeed do. So the Lord is seeking to do that which will be blessing to his people.

[6 : 54] He is seeking to give them that which will be for their good, for their blessing, for the love of them. And the Lord loved the people. So this law is given for them.

And through this law, there is blessings and prophecies pronounced for each of the tribes of the children of Israel. Simeon, of course, is mysteriously missing, or missing in this case.

Exactly why he's been missed out here, well, that's another sermon we could talk about that. But what I want to focus upon is what is said particularly to Asher. And of course, in the original context, it is given to Asher.

But that which is given to the Lord's people of old, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, is given ultimately for all the Lord's people. It is written down and preserved so that it may be read.

Everything that has been written, ever, anywhere in the world, is written in order to be read. And if it is written down, it is intended to be preserved.

[7 : 54] Because that which we remember or that which we memorize, we may forget. Or that which one person memorizes, when they die, it dies with them. But that which is written down is intended for posterity.

It is intended to be remembered and referred back to again and again. Therefore, that which the Lord has inspired to be written down is intended not merely for Asher or Ephraim or Joseph or for Judah or whatever the case may be.

It is intended for all the wrongest people. So let Asher be blessed with children. Let there be abundance from him and of him. Remember how, you know, the blessing, the happiness that Asher brings is his mother when he was born or rather, I suppose, since he was born through Zilpah, his mother's handmaid.

We read that when he was born, Genesis 30 and verse 13, Zilpah, Leah's maid, bare Jacob, a second son and Leah said, happy am I for the daughters will call me blessed and she called his name Asher and the name Asher literally means happy.

So Asher is blessed, let Asher be blessed with children because when he was born, his mother said that the Lord had blessed her and she would be called blessed amongst the daughters and she called him the name that means happy.

[9 : 22] So let Asher be blessed with children, let him be acceptable to his brethren, let him dip his foot in oil. Now this implies not only that that with which one normally would be anointed and would therefore be an extremely limited volume because it is so precious.

Oil was a great precious and expensive commodity and if your head was anointed with oil that made you special because it was kings and priests, high priests and prophets occasionally who were anointed we read of and of course Jesus, the Messiah, Messiah means anointed as does the word Christ, the Greek equivalent it means anointed one, Christ is anointed with the Holy Spirit above measure and above all his brethren.

So here we have this anointing but it's not just anointing but it's such abundance that he can dip his feet in oil. Now of course if there's going to be that kind of abundance, that kind of abundance of anointing then you're going to be somebody pretty special to be not just anointed with your head but to be able to dip your feet in it.

Again, who do we read as the fulfilment of this? Well, I know you've guessed it already but just to prove it from scripture here we go to Luke chapter 7 where the woman who was supposedly a sinner in the city we read of how she wept at Jesus' feet and at verse 38 we read she stood at his feet behind him weeping and began to wash his feet with tears and he wiped them with the hairs of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with ointment.

Nowadays with the National Health Service and pharmaceuticals and so on we tend to think of ointment as something that comes out of a tube. We tend to think of it as something which you rub on a sore bit but ointment in those days was effectively oil of different kinds of consistency or thickness probably of the thicker and certainly of a fragrant variety.

[11 : 24] Verse 46 Jesus says to his host my head with oil that it's not anoint but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. That oil-based ointment oil-based substance fragrant and thick and of such abundance that the Messiah's feet are not only dipped in it but anointed with it.

And we have a hint of this abundance of blessing when we read of Asher let him dip his foot in oil because that which is applied to some here is to be taken to be having application to all the Lord's people or directing them of course as all the law does ultimately to Christ.

The anointed one. The one who not only is anointed in his head by the Spirit but anointed in his feet with oil by the penitent and those who come to him by faith.

Let him dip his feet in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass again differences of opinion as to the commentators on this. Does it mean for example the strength of his feet as he treads down his enemies?

Possibly. Does it mean protection in his working or the agriculture of the land because apparently in ancient times it wasn't just soldiers who might have their feet shod with a layer of iron under their shoes for protection in the marching and you know we read of Goliath of Gath he had greaves of brass on his shoes on his lower legs as armour but apparently farmers and country workers would have their legs and feet to some extent protected with metal protection against stones or rough ground or whatever and it would be needed in those days and in that context.

[13 : 10] It could be a reference to that. Some take it to mean that the reference to feet and being shod is a reference to what is underground. In other words to the iron and brass that which can be dug mined from the ground which was Asher's tribal territory and it is certainly true that Tyre and Sidon and that sort of area where Asher's tribal territory was near to they got their wealth much of their wealth from mining bronze and iron and so on and copper and other things out of the hills so it could be a reference to that.

And all of these things are true like you shall be iron and brass but it's this latter part of verse 25 I really want us to think about. As thy days so shall thy strength be.

Now all of us at times feel our days to be more than we can manage. Our days to be so filled with challenges or difficulties or problems that we think we cannot possibly overcome.

They are too much for us. We are drowning. We are overwhelmed by either the attacks of the evil or just the sheer volume of all that there is to do and we think we cannot manage.

We think we are drowning. We are overwhelmed. We are too weak. We haven't got the strength for this. In one sense of course we don't have the strength. We only have strength from the Lord. But we're not required today to have strength for next week.

[14 : 45] We're not required for tomorrow to have that strength now. Even when Jesus' disciples were prophesied by him to be going to be dragged before princes and kings and synagogues and so on and he said you know the Lord will give you in that hour what he shall speak because it's not you that speak it's the Holy Ghost that speaks in you.

Now I do not doubt that all the disciples and every Christian who have been faced with that situation would love to be able to know in their cell beforehand this is what I'm going to say I've got all my speech worked out and I'm going to say this and just sort of fine tune the wording so that I'm really going to sock it to them when it comes to me standing up my stand I'll be ready with my wonderful speech.

No you're not you're not going to have it you're not going to be given it the night before you're not going to be given it the day before or the week before but come the hour the Lord will provide what you need Jesus said to his disciples Luke 22 at verse 35 when he was reminding them of how he had sent them out by two and two initially in chapter 9 of Luke and then in chapter 10 and he said when I sent you without purse and script and shoes lacked ye anything and they said nothing and we just flash back there to chapter 9 for example where Jesus sends out initially the twelve and he sent them to preach the kingdom of God to heal the sick and he said take nothing for your journey neither staves nor script neither bread neither money neither have two coats of peace and whatsoever house ye enter into they are buying and then depart and whosoever will not receive you when you grow out of the city shake off the very dust for their testimony against them they departed went through the tongues preaching the gospel and healing everywhere and Jesus says to them did you lack anything

I said no we didn't lack anything and yet if somebody had said to them beforehand now you're going off on this journey this preaching tour do you want to have shoes or no shoes do you want to have a script that's a little bag with supplies in it or nothing do you want to take a staff for the journey or would you rather not do you want to take some money just in case of emergencies or just not you know every single one of us will say yeah I'll take a wee bag of supplies thanks of course I'm going to want strong shoes I'll take a staff but that's just sensible and money in case there's emergency you know you've got to be prepared that's just a sensible thing to do but Jesus is stripping down all these layers of protection he is taking away any kind of worldly dependence so that they have nothing that they can depend upon except himself and he says when I sent you without personal script and shoes lacked you anything and they served nothing they didn't lack for anything although undoubtedly if it had been up to them it had been up to us it had been up to anyone we would not choose to be so devoid of if you like reserves we always want to have reserves we always want to be on top of things we always want to have you know just a little bit more than we might actually eat just in case just in case there's an emergency just in case something crops up and you know we eat well today but James we don't know what we're going to eat tomorrow well tomorrow the Lord provides you know what you can't do of course we mentioned this in the past is if you know that you're going to be thirsty tomorrow you can't glug down 10 gallons of water and say no I won't need anything tomorrow well yes you will because the body will have its way of passing it out whether through sweat or other means and it will be gone and tomorrow you'll be thirsty again you cannot store up like camels do water and food and so on you need it every day but each day the Lord will provide and each day the Lord provides sufficient strength and understanding and ability not for what you might want not for what you might choose or desire any more than the being for the disciples but for what you will need as thy days so shall thy strength be now many commentators have pointed out that when it says as thy days it doesn't just mean you're not a physical 24 hour period but rather it is a reference to almost a poetic reference to the events of that day as thy days so shall thy strength be whatever comes against you whatever happens in that day whatever may be the requirements of that day that you do not choose you know you don't want these bad things to happen you don't want these challenges you'd rather have no challenges you don't want difficulties you'd rather have no difficulties you don't want problems or enmity or difficulties or opposition you'd rather you'd rather have a smooth run of course we would all rather have that but these things will come and the fact that the matter is when they come the Lord promises for trusting in him as thy days whatever the days may require you put your trust in him at the beginning of the day you commit yourself to him the night before you begin the day with him and he will supply not your desires necessarily but your needs as thy days so shall thy strength be you might say yeah but I mean the day might come when you don't have sufficient strength and then you get overcome and then you die well that's true but until the very last one you will have all the strength that you need and on the day you die well everybody dies sometimes everybody dies of something everybody dies eventually unless the Lord comes back but what state are you going to be in when that happens and the Lord will have given you sufficient strength right up to the last day nobody can ask

for more than that no strength that you may have here upon earth is going to do you any good in heaven assuming we get there assuming we're sufficient that we're saved by Christ and we'll be in heaven and no amount of good or wealth or power if we're in the alternative if we're going to be in hell it won't do us the least bit of good there either so whatever we have here is only ever going to do us any good while we're here that God provides for it while we are here as thy days so shall thy strength be this is the promise to Asher but it is the promise to all the Lord's people also in 1 Thessalonians Paul writes in the closing verses he says faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it we think oh well suppose God doesn't keep his word suppose he doesn't come through for us you know the very God of peace sanctify you wholly and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it if we are to be preserved faithful until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ if we are in Christ then it means that when he comes back we will either be coming back with him or we will be waiting to greet him you see if we are taken away from his life before Christ comes and that's the that is the lot of all of us unless we are alive when he comes back we will be gone from here before he does but if that's the case it means that when he comes when the day of Jesus Christ comes and he comes back to earth we don't miss out on it because we are either here greeting him waiting for him when he comes or else we are coming with him as part of the hosts of heaven and so we will be kept and preserved as Paul pleads for the Thessalonians and again that which applies to the Thessalonians applies also to all the Lord's people they will accept and receive of it but what he promises is faithful is he that calleth you who also will do that we are so often not faithful we are so often fretful and doubtful and inclined to think that God is about to let us down we are in a sense like Peter who full of faith stepped out in the boat and walked on water and credit to him for it but then he looked around and he heard the wind howling and he began to doubt and he began to sink and we have all had that sense of beginning to sink and many of us all of us have sunk at times but we have not been overflowed by the flood isn't that what it promises in Isaiah when I pass through the waters

[23 : 34] I will be with thee and through the floods they will not overflow thee yes Peter you may begin to sink but the Lord reached out his hand and grasped him and said oh you have little faith wherefore did it stand out you know you had faith so far that's good but Christ is there to save and to prevent from perishing those who have put their trust in him even though their faith is weak thankfully mercifully we are not saved by the strength or virtue or quality of our faith we are saved by the Saviour we are saved by the one in whom that faith is placed now our faith may be of poor quality or it may be perhaps of short or limited duration but if that faith is in Christ then it is Christ who will save faithful is he that calleth you who also will do it as thy days so shall that strength be the Lord promises that whatever it is that we need for the days that he sends he will provide there are many temptations and many difficulties and many problems

God does not pull any punches or make any false rose tinted promises he says you know it's going to be tough take off your cross and follow me no matter how he put his hand to the plough and looking back he's spent for the kingdom of God you're going to go forward with it and it's going to be tough but however tough it is he will give the strength for it we read in 1 Corinthians 10 verse 13 there is no temptation taken you but such as is common to man but God is faithful there's that word again faithful see the quality he will not suffer you to be tempted above that you're able but will with the temptation also make a way to escape that you may be able to bear it notice what it says and also you may be able to dodge it or so you may be able to evade it but so you may be able to bear it that the temptation the challenge the problem when it comes you will be able to come through it to bear it because the

Lord knows the strength that he has given you he knows that he has given enough he is not going to require of you more than he has given you strength for it's like if you send a child into the shop for groceries or whatever that you know come to say £2.57 and you give them £2.60 but they go and choose other stuff and they say yeah lots of and that lots of and that and they come to and they come to £5.83 oh dear what's the problem I haven't got enough now I'm in trouble you have enough for exactly what you required of you you've been given exactly enough and a little to spare for what it was you were sent for but you don't necessarily have enough we're going to take a bit of that a bit of that a bit of the next thing God sends us to a particular task a particular duty a particular calling to face a particular problem and for these things he will get sufficient wherefore my dearly beloved free from idolatry we were talking about that yesterday of course take the idol off the throne the self deny the self its idolatrous throne deny the self take up the cross and follow him daily and there is the warning also in the previous verse 12 of verse 12 where it says no temptation is taking but such is common to man it says wherefore let him that think if he stand it take heed lest he fall you can't be like a little child going in the shop giant

I can get the money in here I can get whatever I want no you can't you can get the thing that you've been sent for you can get the thing that you need you've got exactly enough money a little over for what you need but you don't have enough to buy up the whole shop with whatever you like you haven't been given strength and grace to be reckless with all the temptations you might decide to wander into but the ones the Lord sends against you or the one the Lord allows to come against you brother for these he will have given sufficient strength and more to resist there hath no temptation taken you such as has come to man in other words nobody can say oh this is much worse than anybody else nobody's had to go through what I had to go through lots of other saints will have had to go through what you've had to go through we are although fearfully and wonderfully made as far as our human nature is concerned we are not actually that diverse we are not actually that different men and women are still sinners in every age men and women have the same weaknesses the same fallible nature the same temptations the same problems and if you look back thousands of years you see it in the bible the same jealousies the same temptations the same weaknesses the same desires illicit or otherwise it's all there and it's all been there from the time of the fall and it will be there till the lord comes back whatever temptation it is that comes against us the lord has given us sufficient he will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able god is faithful whether or not we may be so what the lord prophesies to moises to asher is true also for us yes we'll be blessed we'll be happy as his name means and the followers of the lord ought to be happy blessed with children the lord will give his children to his people they may not be biological children they may be brothers and sisters in christ they may be sons and daughters in the faith just as we have mothers and fathers in israel we have a family in the lord's people let him be acceptable to his brother let him dip his foot in oil the anointing will be such that it will be of such sufficiency and abundance that not only the head but the feet also will be anointed thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as thy days so shall thy strength be if you are only going to live to be 84 years old the lord is not going to give you sufficient grace and strength for a 97 year old if you're only going to have to face five particular temptations he may not necessarily give you the strength for ten but he will give you what you do need he will give you sufficient for each day and if tomorrow there is a big worry or a big fear or a big anxiety the lord will give sufficient on that day and for that day he may not give it tonight he may not give it today but he will give it on the day and you might think wow that's a big promise you're making standing there in the pulpit but I wouldn't dare

I would not presume to say yes brother sister you'll have exactly what you need tomorrow or next week or whenever it is because I can't claim it except that I had before me in the word of God as thy days so shall thy strength be it is not the words of any man it is not the chattering of the lips of a fallible human being it is the invincible and infallible word of God written now inspired and written down to apply to the Lord's people to be remembered by the Lord's people to be read by the Lord's people to be referred to by the Lord's people in generation after generation as their days come and then go so the Lord gives strength sufficient for each of those days until the very last one as thy days so shall thy strength be this is the word and the promise of the living

[32 : 04] God who is faithful and will do it