

Shoes of brass and iron

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] Deuteronomy 33 verse 25 Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days so shall thy strength be.

These were the words of promise pronounced by Moses over the children of Asher. The children of Israel had now reached what we call a watershed in their history.

Great changes were going to take place. It had taken them 40 years to come from Egypt through the wilderness of Sinai to the borders of the promised land.

And all they had to do now was to cross the river Jordan and into the land that God had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob.

The land that God had promised to Moses.

[1 : 32] In his days he had only one more thing to do. That was to bless each of the tribes, then to leave them, to walk up the mountain, Mount Nebo, to be given a last look at the promised land, and there he was to die, and God was going to be his undertaker.

It tells us that God buried him there. That no man knows of his sepulcher to this very day. There's not a place where you can point and say, this is where Moses was buried.

It's a secret known only to God. But before he leaves them, Moses pronounces over each of the tribes a blessing.

This was the customary thing for a father to do with regard to his children. And Moses was acting on this occasion as the great father of Israel.

And as he looks at each of these tribes, he pronounces over them blessing. And as he comes to the tribe of Asher, he says, Asher, may God make you a fruitful tribe.

[2 : 50] May God bless you with children. And then he goes on to say, may God also make you a rich tribe. Let Asher dip his foot in oil.

And that was symbolic of richness. And then he goes on to say this to them, Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

Now as you and I go back over these promises that were made long ago, we might say what wonderful promises they were. And how they suited these people in their different situations.

Because as we will see, this was a promise to the tribe of Asher that suited them for the situation in which they found themselves. And you might be inclined to say, Well, what has that got to do with me in 1985?

Well, you see, it has everything to do with you and to do with me because all the promises of God are, as the Apostle Paul tells us, Yea and Amen in Christ Jesus.

[4 : 07] That is to say, Every promise that God has made is still relevant. Every promise that God has made is there for you to grasp hold of and for me to grasp hold of.

And so, just as Moses said that way back these thousands of years ago, right across the ages of history, these words come to us today and what is God saying to us?

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as thy day is, so shall thy strength be. What do these words suggest?

Well, they suggest to us, don't they, a road that we have to go. They also suggest the equipment that is there for us on the road and also the promise to sustain us.

Let's think of this road that Asher had to tread. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass. Now, the very description of the shoes indicates for us the character of the road.

[5 : 28] What was the road like that was ahead of the children of Asher? Well, Moses could foresee that it was going to be a rough road and that is why he says to them, thy shoes shall be iron and brass.

In his book, *Shoes for the Road*, one of our famous preachers of the Free Church in the past, Dr. Alexander Stewart, tells us in his sermon, *Shoes for the Road*, that Asher's inheritance, he says, included a stretch of rocky coast extending from Carmel to Sidon.

That's from the western seaboard of the land of Palestine. Carmel to Sidon. It was rocky. And he goes on to say it was a region in which travelling was difficult.

The wayfaring man had to pass through rough places. At one time having to climb over great boulders of rock which lay across his path.

at another having to tread on sharp edge stones. That's the kind of road, you see, that the children of Asher had to negotiate.

[6 : 53] Great mountainous boulders. Sharp cutting stones. And on that kind of a rough road, you had to have shoes of quality that would stand up to the roughness of the road.

No less than shoes of iron and brass. And you see, there is another point to all this. Because as Moses sees this kind of territory in front of the children of Asher, he sees how also in front of them there are so many other difficulties as well as the physical difficulties of the road.

And you see, this is what life is about, isn't it? What is life? It's a rough road. In our days of childhood, we don't discover the roughness of the road so much if we happen to be brought up in reasonable, good homes.

We don't discover the roughness of the road. Our parents take care of the roughness. For us, you see, in our early days, all the days are full of sunshine.

All the days are full of happiness. All the days are full of joy. It's only those youngsters who happen to be brought up in homes where they are mistreated and they're treated by inhuman parents that it can be so different.

[8 : 37] But for the normal child who is brought up in a normal home, he looks back, she looks back. And what kind of a home is it?

It's a home where it's all sunshine and all happiness and all security. All because in that home there is love. But then the child, as he grows on into adolescence and into manhood or into womanhood, discovers that it's not always like that.

Because life begins to take on a different meaning when the responsibilities and when the cares of life come upon you. And that's when you discover that life is no longer full of days of sunshine.

That's when you discover that life begins to become difficult. And there are the distressing things that you have to meet and contend with.

There are these massive obstacles like the great boulders that were in front of the children of Asher. There are the sharp cutting stones that leave you with torn and bleeding feet, causing pain, causing distress.

[10 : 02] And this is the kind of world that we are living in. A world full of difficulties. A world full of trouble. A world full of pain and a world full of distress.

And maybe it is that there is someone and you've come into this church this morning and you are thinking as I speak to you just now, if you are listening at all, and you are saying, yes, you know, you're right enough, life is a bit rough.

And maybe it is that you are going through a rough patch yourself. And it's difficult for you. And you wonder how you're going to negotiate life.

How you're going to make your way through it. Well, here is God's promise. Just as it was given to the children of Asher long, long ago, so it comes with equal relevance to you.

If you are listening, and what is God's promise? If you believe in him, if you trust in him, his promise is this, thy shoe shall be iron and brass, you will be able to negotiate the road.

[11 : 13] You will be able to traverse it. You will be able to make your way through these difficulties and through these rough patches. But not only do these shoes suggest a rough road, but they also suggest to us a hazardous road.

A road full of dangers, perils. And one great benefit of having shoes of iron and brass is that the feet of the traveler is well, they are well protected.

From what? Well, from things that we are not accustomed to. For example, we are not accustomed to poisonous serpents.

We are not accustomed to poisonous insects on the roadways. But there are some countries where you do get these poisonous reptiles and these poisonous insects.

There they are. They are lurking in the shadows of the roadway. There they are. They are ready to dart out if you disturb them. And what do they do?

[12 : 33] Here is this poisonous reptile and it bites. And once it has bitten, it injects its deadly poison into you.

Here is this insect. It will do the same. If you disturb it, it will go for you. It will attack. It will inject its poison into you.

And that's when you need to have your feet well protected. And this is what Moses is saying to the children of Asher. I know, he says.

I know that on that road that you're going to traverse, you're going to be exposed to many dangers. But God will give you the protection that you need.

And of course, you and I, as we go through life, we are exposed to the dangers that beset us in the way of life. You might say to me, what dangers?

[13 : 31] Are you talking about accidents? Are you talking about death coming suddenly and swiftly to us? No, I'm not thinking so much of that.

What I'm thinking about is sin itself. The most dangerous thing that we have to contend with. And there in front of us, of course, is our greatest enemy of all.

And the greatest enemy to you is not the hidden danger caused by the accident. The hidden danger, as far as you are concerned, and as far as I am concerned, is the devil himself.

And he is there, larking on the highways of life, waiting, with his cruel eyes bent, as the psalmist puts it.

His cruel eyes fixed upon the unsuspecting pedestrian. And how we need protection from him. Because what does sin do once it strikes you?

[14 : 44] It injects its deadly poison into your whole system. And you need protection from sin. You need protection from the devil.

Sin, when it is finished, brings forth death. And here were these children of Asher, and they were exposed, not only to the roughness of the road in front of them, but to the dangers that beset them. And this is how it is with you and with me. We are exposed to the roughness of the road, but we are also exposed to the dangers that lurk there in front of us by way of sin and by way of the devil himself.

And you know, this road that we have to traverse, it's such a tiring road, because that's suggested in these words of promise, As thy day, so shall thy strength be.

And there must have come a time in the experience of these children of Asher when they must have wondered, is it always going to be like this?

[15 : 53] If we had known a way back when Moses spoke these words, it's questionable, they might have said, whether we would have tackled trying to subdue this land, this territory that's allotted to us.

It was going to be exhausting. And life, you see, is like that. It's exhausting. With all the difficulties that we face, with its trials, with its sorrows, with its hardships, with its temptations, with its sin, we seem to find ourselves going uphill all the time.

And perhaps, you see, with these inward tensions and these outward pressures, you may say, is life always going to be like this?

Yes, always. There will be no let up. There will be no calm seas. There will always be some current. There will always be a ground swell. It's there all the time. You know, Dr. Chalmers, the great free church leader, always hoped that when he would reach the age 65, he would lay his burdens down.

[17 : 29] And what he wanted was one year of calmness, one year of rest, one year of rest, what he called a sabbatical year.

And you know why he wanted that? He wanted that in order to prepare himself for his last encounter with death in order to be ready to meet God.

and you know he wasn't given it. The disruption took its toll of him. He was spent.

He was worn out. He was afraid. And when at last the year came when he hoped that this would be the time when he could get alone with God and when all the pressures around him would be lifted and when he would be able to concentrate on his God and meet him, suddenly death struck him.

And when his family went to see him in the morning, instead of finding him ready for another day, his spirit had gone to be with Christ.

[18 : 55] And the year that he had hoped for was never granted. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as thy day so shall thy strength be.

But you know, here is the equipment and I won't keep you over long. Here is the equipment for the road. Shoes. What like are the shoes? Shoes of iron and brass. And these suggest to us, don't they, strong shoes.

Shoes of a durable quality. Ordinary footwear would wear out but not shoes of iron and brass.

Shoes of iron and brass will last to the very end.

And that's the promise, you see, that God was making to the children of Asher through Moses. Oh, says God, to these people, I know that the way ahead of you is rough.

I know your difficulties but I'll give you the equipment to take you through life. and I suppose if we were to meet the good Dr. Chalmers that we have been speaking about, he would say to us, you know, I didn't really need that year of preparation.

[20 : 14] You know, God was with me and God took me safely through right at the very end. And that's how it will be with you if you and I trust in God and in Christ as the Savior.

We will be given the equipment that will last us out to the end of our days. You remember Paul speaking about it in that chapter that we read together, Ephesians 6.

See, he says, that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Have your feet in the ways of Christ.

Have your feet in his footsteps and you will be led safely right on through. Or, let me take you to Isaiah the prophet when he is speaking about the coming of Christ.

You know what he says? Every valley shall be exalted. Every mountain and hill shall be made low. Or the krugat shall be made straight. The rough place is plain.

[21 : 22] What does that mean? Every valley shall be exalted. There's a valley. See how dark it is? You don't want to go down into it.

You say, as you look down into that valley, I don't like it. It's not for me. I prefer the plains. And all the time you see Providence is pushing you and saying, you must go down into that valley.

That's the way that you've got to go to reach the other side. And as you descend, your spirit descends just as the valley does.

And you feel a sense of depression coming over you. And you wonder, how am I going to get through this? But here is Christ.

And if you are with Christ and Christ is with you, then every valley shall be exalted. That's what it means. The depression will lift.

[22 : 35] You'll suddenly find yourself in the sunshine. Or again, there is the mountain. And you say, no, surely I don't have to climb that mountain.

I can't make it. I can't do it. It's beyond me. And yet, that's the mountain you've got to climb. And there's no way out of it.

But you say, I can't make it. But here is Christ with you. And he says to you, you can make it. I'm with you. And so you start ascending.

And as you begin to ascend this steep mountain, you're wondering, will you make the top? Every mountain and hill shall be made low. And with Christ the mountain is being reduced.

or again, here you come to this way that is in front of you and you thought it was going to be straight and easy.

[23 : 42] But instead of that, as you look at this road that you have to go, you've discovered now that it's crooked and it's twisting. and you say, I wonder how I can make that road.

I wish it was straight. But here is Christ with you. And the crooked shall be made straight. And the rough places shall be made smooth with Christ.

That's what happens. So Moses, you see, was giving every encouragement to these children of Asher. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as thy days so shall thy strength be.

In other words, God will give you the equipment to help you through. We can describe these shoes not only as durable but powerful.

You see, with shoes like that on your feet you can trample underfoot the serpent that's poisonous, the insect that is poisonous. With shoes like that on you, with the equipment that God gives to you, you can trample on sin.

[25 : 04] You can meet head on the devil and face him. You know how wise John Bunyan was when he wrote The Pilgrim's Progress.

I never cease to be amazed at his insights into Bible truth. And you remember how when he is telling us about Christian going through the valley where Apollyon was. And as Christian makes his way through this valley and he has to face Apollyon, that's the devil. There is that great dragon and he is firing his darks at Christian. And Christian must raise his shield, the shield of faith wherewith he could quench the fiery darks of the wicked. And this is the point that Bunyan makes. That as he looked at Christian he saw that he had only equipment for his front. There was no protection for his back. Why did Bunyan say that?
[26 : 13] Because what Bunyan was pointing out was this, that when you go through that valley you don't turn back. You go head on and you meet the devil head on and by the grace of God you overcome him.

Thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as thy days so shall thy strength be. And this is just one more word. We've talked about the road. We've talked about the equipment. Now here is the promise. What are you promised? As thy days so shall thy strength be.

The promise is that you are given strength that will be constant. That's what you are promised. That's what the children of Asher were promised.

This is the promise that God makes to those who put their trust in him. I'll give you, he says, constant strength for whatever situation might arise.

[27 : 28] And you know there are situations that do arise and you need certain grace and certain strength for these situations. You don't have that grace or strength now because you're not in the situation.

But once you do come to that situation then be sure of this. If you are a Christian, if your trust is in God, if you believe in Christ, when you come to that situation the strength will be given, the grace will be given.

For example, none of us knows what it is to be poor. But supposing you did become poor, you say, I just don't know how I would face that.

I don't know how I would face it at all. Oh yes, you go into the supermarket, it's bulging with stuff. There are all these tins, there are all these goods, you store and stuff your basket and you go home and your cupboards full and your fridge is full and your deep freeze is full and your bank is quite full too and your home is full of all these nice things and you say, but you know, if I lost all these things, I don't know how I would cope.

you look at these pictures of these poor people of Ethiopia and you say to yourself, I just, I couldn't stand that and you don't want to stand it and you don't like it.

[29 : 07] But as thy days, so shall thy strength be. So if suddenly the supermarket was empty and your fridge was empty and your deep freeze was empty and your home was empty and you were left with nothing, how would you face up to it?

You would face up to it by the grace of God and by the strength of the Lord. That's how you would face up to it. It's the same with sickness. There are illnesses that overtake us and you say to me, you know, there are certain things I just don't know, I don't want to face them.

Ah, but you will face them if you are in Christ. Your strength will be made perfect in weakness. And you say to me, you know, I just don't want to think about death.

I don't know how I would fear in death. Well, Job stood up to these things. Job was prepared to face death itself.

And he was able to say, though he slay me, yet will I trust him. And with his trust in God, he could meet the situation.

[30 : 31] same with Paul, with his thorn in the flesh, whatever it was. He prayed earnestly that God might take it. No, said God, I won't take it from you, but I'll give you strength.

The eternal God is thy refuge, said Moses to these children of Asher, as well as to the others. The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.

And because of that we can sing, as we so often do in Psalm 46, God is our refuge and our strength. As thy days, so shall thy strength be.

Whatever like the days, the strength is there. And that strength promised will be given to the end of our days. As thy days, so shall thy strength be.

You know, the older you become, so the weaker you get. Isn't that true? That's nature, isn't it? Your eyesight begins to fail as you get old.

[31 : 54] Your step no longer is the same quick, resilient step that it was twenty, thirty years ago. You've slowed down. Your days have been shortened, and between now and the grave there's not much time.

But you know, it's different in the realm of the spirit, because here is a Christian growing old. And what do you notice about the Christian who grows old gracefully in the Lord? His strength becomes firm. His confidence is unshakable. He meets the situations, and he never gets excited about them.

The grace of God is resting on him. You see, there is a difference between an older Christian and a younger Christian.

I remember once being in the Glasgow Presbytery, and we had an old minister. He was coming to the end of his day. And there was one of the young men who had just come to the Presbytery, and he was full of eagerness, full of zest, full of youth.

[33 : 16] Everything was full of life, and then suddenly something went wrong. And he was so concerned, this young minister. He got excited about things.

And this old man said to him, Mr. So-and-so, the sun will shine again. That's wisdom from an old man.

as thy days, so shall thy strength be. So whatever like the days, and however many the days, you'll be given the strength.

But I ask you this as I close. Do you know God in this way? Do you know Christ, in whom these promises are ye and amen? You put your trust in him, and this promise is yours.

thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days, so shall thy strength be. Let us pray. O Lord, our God, we pray thee that we may know thee as our God and Father, and may we know Christ, in whom the promises are made over to us, and do thou grant that indeed we may know something of this promise, of having equipment to strengthen us for the way of life that we have to go.

[34 : 48] And as the days are, so may our strength be. In Christ's name we ask all our men.