

How do we walk today? - remembering the covenant way

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[0 : 00] Now we come to our Bible reading. Willis continuing his series in Deuteronomy, and if you turn, please, to page 146. It's a long reading. We're going to read the whole of chapters 2 and 3.

We'll read it in two parts. Chapter 3, verse 11, we'll pause and sing a hymn and then read the rest of it. But remember in chapter 1, Moses has begun his great sermon, just as the people are about to enter the promised land.

And now in these chapters, he's giving us, he's looking back at the journey they have traveled and talking about the faithfulness of God in all circumstances.

So Deuteronomy, chapter 2, verse 1, reading, first of all, to chapter 3, verse 11. Moses says, So we went on away from our brothers, the people of Esau who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road from Eilat and Ezion-Geber.

[2 : 08] And we turned and went into the direction of Moab, in the direction of the wilderness of Moab. And the Lord said to me, do not harass Moab or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because I have given our to the people of Lot for a possession.

The Emim formerly lived there, a people great and many and tall as the Anakim. Like the Anakim, they are also counted as a Rephaim, but the Moabites call them Emim.

The Horites also lived in Seir formerly, but the people of Esau dispossessed them and destroyed them from before them, and settled in their place as Israel did to the land of their possession, which the Lord gave to them.

Now rise up and go over the brook Zeret. So we went over the brook Zeret. And the time from our leaving Kadesh Barnea until we crossed the brook Zeret was 38 years, until the entire generation, that is, the men of war had perished from the camp as the Lord had sworn to them.

For indeed, the hand of the Lord was against them to destroy them from the camp until they had perished. So as soon as all the men of war had perished and were dead from among the people, the Lord said to me, Today you are to cross the border of Moab at Ar, and when you approach the territory of the people of Ammon, do not harass them or contend with them, or I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot for a possession.

[3 : 47] This also counted as a land of Rephaim. Rephaim formerly lived there, but the Ammonites called them Zanzummim, a people great and many and tall as the Anakim.

But the Lord destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place, as he did for the people of Esau who live in Seir, when he destroyed the Horites before them, and they dispossessed them and settled in their place even to this day.

As for the Avim who lived in the villages as far as Gaza, the Kaphtarim who came from Kaphtor destroyed them and settled in their place.

Rise up, set out on your journey, and go over the valley of the Arnon. Behold, I have given into your hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land.

Begin to take possession and contend with him in battle. This day I will begin to put the dread and fear of you on the peoples who are under the whole heaven. We shall hear the report of you, and shall tremble and be in anguish because of you.

[4 : 53] So I sent messengers to the wilderness of Kedemoth, to Sihon the king of Heshbon, with words of peace, saying, Let me pass through your land.

I will go only by the road. I will turn aside neither to the right nor to the left. You shall sell me food for money that I may eat, and give me water for money that I may drink only.

Let me pass through on foot, as the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, and the Moabites, who live in Ard, did for me, until I go over the Jordan into the land that the Lord our God is giving to us.

But Sihon, the king of Heshbon, would not let us pass by him. For the Lord your God hardened his spirit, made his heart obstinate, that he might give him into your hand, as he is this day.

And the Lord said to me, Behold, I have begun to give Sihon and his land over to you. Begin to take possession, that you may occupy his land. Then Sihon came out against us, he and all his people, to battle at Jahaz.

[5 : 59] And the Lord our God gave him over to us, and we defeated him and his sons and all his people. We captured all his cities at that time, and devoted to destruction every city, men, women, and children.

We left no survivors. Only the livestock we took of spoil for ourselves was the plunder of the cities that we captured. From Arur, which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, and from the city that is in the valley as far as Gilead, there was not a city too high for us.

The Lord our God gave all into our hands. Only to the land of the sons of Ammon you did not draw near, that is to all the banks of the river Jabbok, and the cities of the hill country, whatever the Lord our God had forbidden us.

Then we turned and went up the way to Bashan, and Og, the king of Bashan, came out against us. He and all his people to battle at Edri. But the Lord said to me, Do not fear him, for I have given him and all his people and his land into your hand, and you shall do to him as you did to Sihon, the king of the Amorites who lived at Heshbon.

So the Lord our God gave into our hand Og also, the king of Bashan, and all his people, and we struck him down until he had no survivor left.

[7 : 23] And we took all his cities at that time. There was not a city that we did not take from them. Sixty cities. The whole region of Argon, the kingdom of Og in Bashan, all these cities were fortified with high walls, gates and bars, besides very many unwalled villages.

And we devoted them to destruction, as we did to Sihon, the king of Heshbon, devoting to destruction every city, men, women, and children. And all the livestock and the spoil of the cities, we took as our plunder.

So we took the land at that time, out of the hand of the two kings of the Amorites, who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of the Arnon to Mount Hermon. The Sidonians call Hermon Sereon, while the Amorites call it Senir.

All the cities of the table land, and all Gilead, and all Bashan, as far as Salica and Edroy, cities of Og in Bashan. For only Og, the king of Bashan, was left of the remnant of the Rephim.

All his bed was a bed of iron. Is it not in Rabba of the Amorites? Nine cubits was its length, and four cubits its breadth, according to the common.

[8 : 41] Moses continues, When we took possession of this land at that time, I gave to the Reubenites and the Gadites, the territory beginning at Aror, which is on the edge of the valley of the Arnon, and half the hill country of Gilead, with its cities.

The rest of Gilead, and all Bashan, the kingdom of Og, that is the region of Argob, I gave to the half-tribe of Manasseh. All that portion of Bashan is called the land of Rephim.

Jair the Manassite took all the region of Argob, that is Bashan, as far as the border of the Geshurites and the Macathites, and called the villages after his own name, Havoth Jair, as it is to this day.

To Machir I gave Gilead, and to the Reubenites and the Gadites I gave the territory from Gilead, as far as the valley of the Arnon, with the middle of the valley as a border, as far over as the river Jabbok, the border of the Ammonites.

The Arabah also, with the Jordan as a border, from Cinnareth as far as the Sea of the Arabah, the Salt Sea, under the slopes of Pisgah on the east.

[9 : 54] And I commanded you at that time, saying, The Lord your God has given you this land to possess. All your men of valor shall cross over, armed before your brothers, the people of Israel.

Only your wives, your little ones, and your livestock, I know that you have much livestock, shall remain in the cities that I have given to you, until the Lord gives rest to your brothers, as to you, and they also occupy the land the Lord your God gave them beyond the Jordan.

Then each of you may return, then each of you may return to his possession, which I have given you. And I commanded Joshua at that time, Your eyes have seen all that the Lord your God has done to these two kings.

So will the Lord do to all the kingdoms into which you are crossing. You shall not fear them, for it is the Lord your God who fights for you.

And I pleaded with the Lord at that time, saying, O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what God is there in heaven or on earth who can do such works and mighty acts as yours?

[11 : 11] Please let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, that good hill country, and Lebanon. The Lord was angry with me because of you and would not listen to me.

And the Lord said to me, Enough from you. Do not speak to me of this matter again. Go up to the top of Pisgah and lift up your eyes westward and northward and southward and eastward and look at it with your eyes, for you shall not go over this Jordan.

But charge Joshua and encourage and strengthen him, for he shall go over at the head of this people, and he shall put them in possession of the land that you shall see.

So remained in the valley opposite Beth Peor. Amen. This is the word of the Lord. May he bless it to our hearts and our minds. Let's pray.

Well, do turn with me, if you would, to the passage you read, Deuteronomy chapters 2 and 3, page, what was it, 146 in the Blue Church Bibles.

[12 : 20] My title this morning is How Do We Walk Today? This is a chapter all about remembering the covenant way. It's amazing that the true God of heaven, despite all our sins and failures and wasted years in the story of our lives, the true God of heaven still speaks to people like you and me today, calling us to remember him and return to him and go forward with him in his covenant way, the way of the everlasting kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That's what we saw last time in chapter 1, as God calls his people to remember him. And it's what we see again here in chapter 2. We're forcibly reminded once more that today is the day of decision.

Look at verse 14. 38 years and an entire generation has passed judged by God's own hand for their sin.

But now, verse 17, the Lord says, today is the day you are to cross over into Moab and begin all over again.

It's a fresh start today despite everything that's in the past. Well, that might be a very important word to somebody here this today, this morning.

[13 : 42] Is today the day that God is calling you to begin all over again? To begin walking in your true way, in your true calling with the Lord Jesus Christ.

That was the call here to Israel to do just that under God's appointed leader of his people, Moses. And of course, the Apostle Paul says that these scriptures are written for us who belong to Christ's church in these last days.

The Apostle in Hebrews chapter 3 reminds us that Jesus is worthy of far more honor than Moses, that great leader. Moses was faithful, he says, as a servant in God's household, but Jesus is faithful as a son over the whole of God's household.

And we are his household, he says, if we hold fast our confidence in our hope to the end. And so he calls us today, exhort one another as long as it's called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin so as to fall away from the living God.

today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts. And that's a real and present warning, isn't it, to all of us in the church of the Lord Jesus. But instead, the repeat exhortation there in Hebrews is, consider how to stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another as long as it's called today.

[15 : 11] And all the more as you see the great day of the Lord approaching. encouraging one another, that is, to walk with him in his covenant way, the enduring way that he has marked out for us, the straight paths that he's given for our feet.

Well, how do we keep to the straight path? How do we walk today in a manner worthy of the calling that we've received to be children of light, no longer of the darkness?

Well, Paul urges the Ephesian church, doesn't he, to understand the will of the Lord? And we do that through understanding the words of the Lord given through the Spirit in the Scriptures. And

here we have two chapters written for us to teach us how we are to walk today, remembering the covenant way of God's unchanging kingdom, which is the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. You may remember the Lord promises Isaiah much later on that when my people return to me penitently and with faith, their ears shall hear a word saying, this is the way, walk ye in it. And these chapters are very clearly speaking to us today to tell us to walk with the Lord in his covenant way. And that means that we're to walk without distraction, without detachment, and without disappointment.

[16:38] It's a long section, of course, as we read. And I'm going to try and summarize the main themes under these three headings. First of all, look at chapter 2 down to chapter 3, verse 11.

And this whole section, I think, teaches us that God's people must walk without distraction. We must not be out of step with the Lord's purposes.

God is sovereign. God maps out his plan, and he maps out his purposes his way. It's we who have to fit in with him, not vice versa, as we often like to think. And his sovereign purpose is for the blessing of all nations.

And we must remember, therefore, as his privileged people, his chosen people, his church, we must remember that God's scope, God's horizons are much, much bigger than ours.

And we must be humble. Our God, the God of Israel, who is teaching his people here, he's teaching them, he's not some sort of tribal deity that they can possess, as if they alone were his concern.

[17:53] He's the Lord of heaven and earth. And that's the emphasis, isn't it, in the first 25 verses of chapter 2, where God is clearly telling people, his people, that they need to know what they can't have and know whom they mustn't fight.

Verse 1 begins again by emphasizing the many days that they went just round in circles in the wilderness of Seir. The NIV, I think, makes it more helpful by saying it was a very long time because verse 14 makes plain it was 38 years.

But it's just passed over in this verse. One verse, isn't it, because, well, they were wasted years. But verse 7, you see, the Lord is still with them to bless them.

The Lord your God was with you. You've lacked nothing. Well, that's the testimony of Psalm 23 that we sang, isn't it? When the Lord is your shepherd, even through the darkest valley, you will lack nothing.

He's blessed even a rebellious people abundantly, wonderfully, he's blessed them. And remember, God is sovereign over all the nations. Psalm 145, the Lord is good to all and his mercy over all that he has made.

[19:11] And do you remember the heart of the covenant promise to Abraham was that the purpose of God calling a people to be his chosen nation was that all the nations would ultimately be blessed through the seed of Abraham.

In fact, just before Genesis 12 where that promise comes, chapters 10 and 11 of Genesis, show us God laying out all the nations, allotting all of them their places because he does care for them and he has a desire for their inheritance.

And I think that's surely what's echoed in this chapter before us because what we're told here is that Israel by no means has carte blanche just to rape and pillage and conquer any place that they choose just because they think they're God's chosen people.

Absolutely not. I will not give them, verse 5, any of Esau's land because I've given it to him for his inheritance. Likewise, verse 9, the land of Moab and of Ammon in verse 19.

Don't harass and contend with them for I will not give you any of their land for I have given it to them, the sons of Lot for a possession. And do you see how that puts Israel's election by God in its right perspective?

[20:29] They are never to think of themselves as some kind of master race of God. They have their sovereignly allotted inheritance from God just as these other nations do.

There can be no hint of pride, no hint of triumphalism in their thinking. And in fact, did you notice as we read the great irony that you see there in these two little sections in brackets, verses 10 to 12 and verses 20 to 23, all about giants.

Because Israel, remember, balked at going into their inheritance in Canaan because they feared the Anakim, the great warrior peoples, despite all God's promise to fight for them and defeat them. But look at verses 10 to 12. The people of Esau defeated the great Rephaim, a people many and tall as the Anakim.

And they settled in their place and so did the Ammonites. Verse 21, they whipped the giant warriors as well. They dispersed them and they settled in their place.

[21 : 32] Only Israel, the chosen people of God, fled and failed in the face of the giants. Isn't that striking? So if anything, they failed even to come up to the standard of the pagan nations in the example that they set to the world.

A terrible thing, isn't it? When the world outshines the church of Jesus Christ and its dignity and its achievements and the blessings that it might bring. But often that has been so, we must admit that. And so there's absolutely no room at all for any kind of superior attitude among Christians when we look out at the world. It's so dangerous, isn't it, when that kind of pride, that kind of sanctimony creeps into the church.

The prophets of God constantly warned Israel against that. Amos chapter 9, speaking to Israel, are you not just like the Cushites, the Ethiopians, to me, O people of Israel?

Did I not bring Israel out of Egypt and the Philistines from Kaphtor and the Syrians from Kir? And he goes on to say, if you behave wickedly just like them, I will destroy you and judge you just as I've destroyed them.

[22 : 45] What made Israel special was never ever just that the land was given to them by God.

No, it was their intimate covenant relationship with the living God of heaven and earth. It was their covenant that made them special. And that covenant relationship must be right.

And that's why verses 14 and 15 are here to remind us these terrible judgments that happened when it wasn't right. And so they need to be humble.

God's people are chosen but chosen to serve his purposes. And they cannot be out of step with those purposes and still enjoy his blessing.

And if God also can use pagan nations to punish evil as he did here, punishing the Horites in verse 12 and punishing the Rephaim in verse 21, then he will do likewise against Israel if they do evil like these ones do.

[23 : 52] And later on in Deuteronomy many times Moses warns the people of exactly that. In fact, later on that is precisely what happened. In Isaiah God says of Assyria the invading nations who took them captive he is the rod of my anger against you.

So friends, God's people must be humble mustn't we? Our calling is not for our blessing alone. Far less is it through any merit of our own.

Our calling is to serve the sovereign God whose purpose is the blessing of this whole world. And so the strategy of God's people must always follow his plan and purpose.

There can be no distraction from it. No meddling in things that God has not called us to be involved with. No getting lost into Bypath Meadow which as John Bunyan warns us in Pilgrim's Progress always leads to doubting castle and in the end to giant despair.

No. Not every battle which might seem to call for action is necessarily a battle the Lord is calling us to fight.

[25 : 02] Not every project that we might think is the calling of the church is the real call. Some things are to be passed by.

Don't contend there said the Lord. That's not your kingdom business. Yours is a clear cut straight path to do what only you can do for me.

As verse 27 puts it you're to turn neither to the right nor the left. you're to follow the path that I have set you on. Now friends that is very important for the church today to remember.

God is sovereign. He does have a plan to bless this whole world through the gospel of his son but he knows best how he will do that and he knows best the path that he has called us to and the part we are to play in that and we are not to be distracted from his plan and purpose.

And our Lord Jesus is very clear is he not? The church's mission is to make disciples of all nations teaching them to obey all that he has commanded through the apostles.

[26 : 17] And there are many things that the church could do besides that. Of course. And there are many things the church can do alongside that but the key question we must always be asking is are we doing what we must do and what only we can do as the church of Jesus Christ?

Are we making disciples for him and not being distracted from that task by anything else? Are we keeping to the task of the preaching and teaching of the commands of the Lord Jesus Christ?

Is it what we're doing as a church? Such an important question. It's an important question for every Christian union to be doing. There are many things you could be doing. Are you doing what you

must be doing and no one else can do?

And very often the Lord does have to say no don't go there. Don't put your energies into that battle. I'm sovereign. I've got that covered but you give your attention to the battles that I have given to you and the mission that is yours and can only be yours.

And of course some battles are very necessary for the unfolding purpose of God's kingdom as verses 26 right down to chapter 3 verse 11 show us where God says know what you must have and whom you must fight.

[27 : 35] If Israel were to keep to their appointed covenant way and not be diverted to the right or to the left then these two battles against Sihon of Heshbon and Og of Bashan could not be shirked because these enemies would not stand aside and stood resolutely opposed to the onward march of the kingdom of God.

So some giants must be faced up to and King Og it seems was the last of these giant warriors the Rephaim with his enormous bedstead 13 and a half feet long by six feet wide he must have been a very big man mustn't he?

Edward I think probably would take your entire egg supply to make his morning omelette I should think. But you see the point here is surely to remind us again of the absolute sovereignty of the Lord the God of Israel because he is the God who is sovereign in blessing the nations and he is sovereign also in judging all the peoples of this world.

This was not a capricious random judgment. The Bible tells us this was the execution of a ripe judgment a measured judgment foretold by God 400 years before this to Abraham in Genesis 15 where he said in time the sins of the Amorites will reach their zenith or their nadir.

This was a culture ripe for judgment it was a terrible culture a violent culture an abusive culture a sexually perverse culture deeply exploitative utterly godless and now at last this culture was going to be judged by the God of heaven who is the true judge the just judge of all the earth and this is just one instance in history of a principle which is there all the way through the story of the Bible from beginning to end that God's name is vindicated and God's people are vindicated through the defeat of his enemies.

[29 : 38] There's no other way is there for evil to be destroyed and God's righteousness to be restored to this world. That was the promise right from the beginning in Genesis chapter 3 that the seed of the woman would crush ultimately the author of evil himself the serpent and of course that promise came to its fullness in the victory of Christ where as Paul says to the Colossians he disarmed rulers and authorities put them to open shame triumphing over them in his death on the cross.

But you see friends verses like this before us are here to remind us that we mustn't ever think of this language of the defeat of God's enemies we mustn't ever think of it just in a sort of figurative sanitized sort of way.

The cross of Jesus was not like that it was a bloody terrible real thing a physical thing and God's judgment on sin and on evil is always a real and a physical terrible thing.

And the Bible is clear Jesus himself was crystal clear that every evidence of God's judgment in history are as much prophetic as they are historic.

That is they are mere shadows of the great judgment that is still to come when the Lord Jesus himself judges this whole world in righteousness on the great day of his wrath.

[31 : 07] Remember what John saw in his vision and revelation on the island of Patmos that great day of wrath when he says all the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful and everyone slave and free will call on the mountains and the rocks fall on us hide us from the face of the one who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb for the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand read it in Revelation chapter 6 so friends if you look at a verse like verse 34 of chapter 2 here or verses 4 to 6 of chapter 3 if they make you feel deeply uncomfortable deeply squeamish then friends you need to realize that these are as Derek Kidner puts it but special cases of God's universal sentence of mortality upon every single human being and they point to an even more terrifying prospect which is the crushing and everlasting defeat of all enemies who will stand in the way of the kingdom of God and seek to defy him and defy the progress of his glorious gospel towards its great consummation in the coming of the Lord

Jesus Christ that's what it's pointing to and the real question for each one of us today is are you lining up with Christ and his people or are you lining up with those who are against Christ and his kingdom with his enemies don't be out of step with the march of God's purposes if this passage

teaches us anything it is to say that to stand against him can only lead to disaster but of course we must also note that as the church of Jesus Christ today it's important for us to realize that these battles were assigned to Israel then only at God's very specific command they went to fight in every place and with every people we've seen that only at God's command verse 24 against Sihon and in chapter 3 verse 2 against Og God alone is the battle commander of his people he alone is the general who dictates his war plan and of course we today living in these last days we also have our clear and obvious battle instructions don't we

Paul was the great apostle to the Gentile world and he was clear on his campaign orders and on his methods 2 Corinthians 10 he says to the church the weapons of our warfare are not flesh and blood but have divine power to destroy strongholds those strongholds of resistance in the human heart to the gospel we destroy arguments he says and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God we take every thought captive to obey Christ that's what we're praying for the university missions this coming week and he talks similarly to the Ephesians as you know saying that the real battle is with the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms those dark powers that are holding human beings still in bondage to evil and he says this is an extended day of God's mercy that we're living in and so we are armed with the gospel of the sword of the spirit through proclaiming Christ and we are calling people to surrender but to surrender to him now and to come under the protection of his peace now before it's too late before at the last day he does come to destroy utterly forever all his enemies so do you see our task is not ever as the church today to wield a physical sword of judgment as God did call his people to then but that is not because as Christians we've somehow moved on in our morality moved away from such barbarity no the God of all the earth will judge this whole world one day and that judgment friends will make this destruction here and every other further pages of history pale into insignificance but you see because he is a God of mercy and of grace who in the person of his own son came himself to bear that awful reality of judgment upon himself in his own body in that terrible judgment on sin in which these verses give us only the faintest echo because of that he has declared today to be an extended day of grace and mercy a day of salvation when we as his people are charged with our battle orders to take this gospel to the ends of the earth calling people to surrender to Jesus

Christ as Lord to bow the knee to him to know him as savior before the day of his great wrath is revealed and will come and must come to this world it's a momentous task a monumental task that we've been given seems to be a huge battle doesn't it an uphill battle just of course as the battles Israel's faced in these chapters seemed exactly like that but Paul says we take the sword of the spirit the gospel of God which is the power unto salvation we take it wielded with prayer because it is God alone who can conquer the hardened human heart and we can only do what God has already done through his great sovereign decree of salvation and again that is exactly the principle that we see at work in these very chapters because always when God is working through his people it is

[37 : 21] God working as his people work verse 31 behold I have given Sihon and his land over to you you go and take possession that you may occupy it chapter 3 verse 3 the Lord God gave Og into our hand and we struck him down and we took his cities you see the Bible never ever ever separates God's sovereignty which is absolute and our full responsibility in the work of the kingdom and the sign that God is sovereignly at work in the world and his salvation is that God's people are at work in the world following his command following his direction and doing that work so we must always be walking without distraction never out of step with his sovereign purposes never drifting into areas that he hasn't ordered us to be in battle but never avoiding the essential battle for the gospel in our day where we are called always to fight the good fight and to follow our commander we're to walk without distraction there's a very important reminder also in verses 12 to 20 here that walking truly in the covenant way of

God's kingdom means that God's people must walk without detachment we must never be out of step with the people of God now the big point of these verses here in chapter 3 from verse 12 following is the warning to this two and a half tribes of Reuben Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh to whom God had granted land on the east side of the Jordan separated from the rest of Israel by the Jordan River but Moses is saying to them you cannot stand alone and you can't survive alone you must stand or fall with the full family of God verses 12 to 17 as you see they summarize the geography you can read the whole story back in Numbers 32 later on these tribes had a lot of cattle and they came to that part of the territory and they saw it was great pasture land and so they said

look Moses could we have this bit of land let us stay here and Moses was very angry with them when they said that because he detected a resurging of that same spirit of Kadesh Barnea where the people said we don't want to go over into that land we'd rather stay here and he saw them as putting their earthly treasures as they saw it their cattle their wealth before the inheritance of God's promised kingdom but they came back to Moses and said no no no we will come we will fight for the whole of Israel only after the whole of the land has been taken will we go back and have our inheritance and Moses said okay then but if you don't do that it will be a great great sin in the sight of the Lord and be sure your sin will find you out you know that verse don't you that's where it comes from and the sin is the sin of detaching yourself from the people of God but thinking that somehow you can still enjoy all the blessings all the inheritance of God without them but that is not so there's a saying that goes right back to the third century of the church to Cyprian the bishop of Carthage for you

Latinists extra ecclesiam nulla salus outside the church there is no salvation of course that's a saying that's been corrupted by the church of Rome in their eyes it means that if you're not in communion with the pope and the communion of Rome then you cannot be saved that's a grave error but the reformers were absolutely clear though that in its true sense referring to the real church of Jesus Christ it is simple biblical truth John Calvin echoed Cyprian when he said this those to whom God is a father the church must also be a mother that is what he's saying is there's no such thing as a faith which unites you to Jesus Christ that doesn't also unite you with the people of Jesus Christ well obviously you can't have God as your true father without having his other children as your true brothers and sisters you stand or fall with the people of God together and that's why Moses is reiterating this warning here to these two and a half tribes in verses 18 to 20 you must stand with all the people of God you must fight with them there's no other way to find the rest and peace for your inheritance verse 20 except by full and responsible participation in the membership of his kingdom with all the rest of God's people that's

Moses clear warning to them and friends that is a very necessary word for the church today beware of thinking that you can have your share in the inheritance your personal salvation from the Lord Jesus Christ without taking your place as a committed soldier of Christ without giving yourself along with all the rest of his people to winning the salvation of all the chosen people of God and if you doubt that remember Moses words in number 32 be sure your sin will find you out and it will find you out to your eternal cost you need to be very careful if you're somebody who thinks that you can just stay on the fringes always of the church never commit to anything never play your part in giving your time your talents your money to the corporate calling of the people of God and think that you can just do that and stay on the edges and still enjoy all the blessing that God has promised to his family you cannot because

[43 : 39] Jesus Christ is building a household a family his church of many brothers and sisters together and if you detach yourself from them you detach yourself from him it's inevitable you must stand or fall with all the people of God now in fact the two and a half tribes did fight with the rest of Israel but even then throughout the rest of their history they did remain somewhat semi-detached from the main body of Israel they were across the Jordan river and if you read the history of Israel from Judges right through Kings what you see is that every single invasion virtually by enemies of Israel they all came from the empires of the northeast Assyria and Babylon and Nineveh and so on and when they came against Israel the first part of the land to be attacked and ravaged and destroyed was the territory northeast across the Jordan river because they were unprotected by the river that they refused to cross in order to preserve their livestock in other words to preserve their business interest preserve their finances friends don't be detached from the church of

Jesus Christ by trying to walk out of step with the people of God it's a dangerous thing to put your own personal freedom your own personal autonomy your desire not to be tied into things or your family commitments or your business interests or your wealth or any of these things to put these things before the bonds of the family of God in Jesus Christ don't be a semi-detached Christian you must stand or fall with the people of God that's why we have church membership some people don't like that terminology it's simply a word to describe your willingness to publicly commit in a real way in a tangible way to the visible family of the church of Jesus Christ and you can't have God as your father if you won't have the church his family as your mother the confession of faith of our church says the visible church is the house and family of God out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation don't be out of step with the people of

God we must walk without detachment if we're walking the covenant way of the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and finally let's look briefly at verses 21 to 29 which tell us that God's people must walk without disappointment don't be out of sorts with the Lord's place with a place that he allots each one of us individually in his unfolding purposes of grace verses 21 and 22 these words to Joshua are wonderfully assuring aren't they about the constancy of God your eye has seen all that the Lord has done and so the Lord will do so fear not you and all the people a wonderful assurance that God gave to Joshua and the people God's unchanging purpose of grace of blessing and yet look at verse 23 and following surely for Moses himself this was bittersweet very moving isn't it sure you thought that as Bob was reading as Moses pleads with the Lord to see more than just the beginning of his great work oh Lord you've only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand that's extraordinary isn't it think what

Moses had seen all the wonders God had done in Egypt and the Red Sea and in the wilderness mighty miracles the mighty revelation from Sinai extraordinary battles that God had won for them and yet for him verse 25 to see and tread himself the good land beyond the Jordan that was a far far greater prize than all the rest the very striking contrast isn't it with the two and a half tribes who just wanted to go over and come back to the real business of cattle wealth money but not so with Moses please please let me go over let me continue to serve you in this life and see more of your wonders that's a great spirit isn't it for somebody coming near the end of their life a great desire to see more to do more for the kingdom of Christ but it wasn't to be for

Moses the Lord said to him that's enough we're not speaking about this again it seems very harsh doesn't it just as it always seems harsh to us when the Lord says no in answer to one of our prayers about some particular thing some great ministry that we long for or some particular career or even a marriage or children or family whatever it might be that the Lord in his sovereign wisdom has seen fit to deny us in our place in this part of our story of course in this case it was because of sin that Moses was denied entry to the land Moses himself tells us he doesn't hide it later on in chapter 32 that he did defy the Lord himself at the waters of Meribah but here verse 26 says the whole situation came about as part of the legacy of Israel's great rebellion it was part of the great spoiling legacy of sin which always spreads like gangrene and has since the beginning tinged this whole world with the curse of sin and that's why all our lives yours and mine that's why they are tinged with so many disappointments so many unrealized hopes so many dashed ambitions and will always be so and of course here God couldn't be just and true could he and just turn a blind eye to Moses just because [49 : 58] Moses was a leader what would that be saying to the people there's a different rule of holiness for those who are leaders among God's people well that's the way of course among the despotic leaders of the world one rule for us and another for the people but not so with you said the Lord Jesus not like the pagans no God is holy he won't yield his glory to another not even the greatest preacher and prophet ever Moses the man of God the man whom every other prophet lived in his shadow and that's a salutary lesson I think to all of us especially to all who are or will be in Christian leadership even a long long life of great fruitfulness and faithfulness nothing ever earns you the right to somehow have a free pass to disregard the commands of God for your life as though somehow you were different no no no and so Moses did face great disappointment and yet even even here see how tenderly see how graciously the Lord speaks to him in verse 27 these words echo almost exactly God's words to

Abraham when he told him to lift up his eyes and look north and south and east and west promising that land for his offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and then you see as here with Moses these words are pregnant with promise for the future although Moses would never set his foot in the land of Canaan and although Abraham still had decades before he even saw one offspring let alone offspring as the stars of heaven it was as if God was saying to both of these men don't be disappointed with your place in this part of the story it's not over yet these are just the shadowlands these are just the sketches in charcoal of what will one day be revealed in glorious technicolor when you shall have a place and shall have an everlasting inheritance with all my people forever when this great story comes to its end this story is not over not by a long way

Joshua is going to take the next steps Moses he'll have his part he will possess the land the land that you won't tread but you will see and one day I promise you you will join all my people my true Israel of God in that better country in that heavenly country you've been looking to from the beginning and you will receive the reward that you've been looking forward to and urging forward towards from the very very start so friends don't be disappointed in your place in the story and the

deprivations that you might face maybe because of the consequences of sin in your life which has perhaps or will deny you the role that you have longed for and you won't ever be able to have or just because of the reality that we all do live in a fallen world under the curse and all of our lives will be tinged with sadness with sicknesses with sorrows with all the things that are wrong in this sin sick world

God says to Moses and he says to us don't fear the story isn't over there's a future and my purpose will not be stopped everything will be accomplished don't be disappointed with your place now because you will have a part in that future you have an inheritance what does Peter say which is imperishable undefiled unfading kept in heaven for you and sure and certain because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead because of Jesus this story will end with all that disappointment gone and you know it's a wonderful thing when you read on in the Bible and you come to chapter 9 of Luke's gospel and you read that at last Moses in fact did stand right in the heart of the land of Canaan on the mount of transfiguration in the glory of Jesus when he and Elijah spoke with him about the great exodus that he was to accomplish at Jerusalem and if I can quote from my father doesn't this whisper to us that what is denied to us in this life because of the disciplines of grace may be granted to us and wonderfully fulfilled for us in the life to come when Jesus comes to bring our feet to the place that we've longed to stand don't be out of sorts with the Lord's place for you in this life and this part of the story don't walk in disappointment all your days but rather look to the future remember that because of Jesus he will restore to you even the years that the locusts have eaten and every disappointment every deprivation will be forgotten and buried in the shadow lands that are now all in the past friends [55 : 31] God is saving his people together forever and nothing will ever stop his plan and purpose not one generation's sins not your sins or mine not the gates of hell says Jesus don't be out of step with him or with his people don't be distracted don't be detached don't be disappointed go on walking with Jesus today and your place in his glorious future will be assured of that we can be certain let's pray oh God protector of all that trust in thee without whom nothing is strong nothing is holy increase and multiply upon us thy mercy that thou being our ruler and guide we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things that are eternal grant this oh heavenly father for

Jesus Christ our lord's sake amen a and