

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Deuteronomy 33:24-25 “A Blessing for the New Year”

Intro. What a year 2011 has been! Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords & 12 others were shot in cold blood. Mubarak & Kaddafi were overthrown from power in Egypt & Libya. Terrorist leader Osama bin Laden was killed by Seal Team 6 Special Forces. Japan experienced a devastating earthquake and tsunami. Greece has had riots over cutbacks caused by excessive spending & debt. Our own country continues to experience high unemployment & a bad economy. For some in our church, 2011 was a difficult year in their personal life.

What does 2012 hold for us, and for our world? Will earthquakes or great storms again cause great damage? Will Iran gain & use a nuclear weapon against Israel? Will the economy get worse or better? 2012 is an important election year in the United States. Who will be elected President? Are you worried about what will happen in 2012?

Well I want us to see from our text of Scripture that you can be blessed in 2012. You see, at this point in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses was about to die, and the nation of Israel was on the threshold of entering the Promised Land, and engage in many battles. No doubt many wondered what the coming year would hold for them. Before Moses died, he gathered the tribes of Israel together and blessed each of the tribes. Today we are going to focus on his blessing upon the tribe of Asher. The name Asher is based on a Hebrew word that means “to make progress” or “to prosper.” The way Moses blesses them relates to the meaning of their tribe’s name.

This morning, I want to apply this blessing to us. Sometimes we wish upon others a happy & prosperous new year. Well, in this blessing that is before us today, Moses pronounces a blessing upon Asher that could result in making them a tribe that would be blessed, prosperous, protected, & empowered. May God grant the same blessing upon us this New Year.

By the way, a couple of months ago I preached the Aaronic blessing found in the book of Numbers. I have been made more aware of the importance of blessing others, especially those in our own family. Fathers have a special role in blessing their children. In too many homes, you could hear cursing & harsh criticism of a man’s wife & children. Instead, there should be blessing & honor.

I’m going to focus on the last 3 blessings found beginning in the last of v.24. Based on this Mosaic blessing:

### I. MAY YOU HAVE PROSPERITY FOR THE NEW YEAR

Moses says, “And let him dip his foot in oil.” This is a reference to the way they would get the oil from the olives that grew in their new land. In that day they would press it out with their feet, the way they would obtain juice from grapes. Olive oil was very valuable for cooking, to give light with oil lamps, & so forth. So Moses was essentially praying that they would be blessed with an abundance of oil. The oil would bring prosperity to their tribe. Implied also is the anticipation that God would give them a land flowing with oil.

In Gen. 49:20 Jacob gave a similar blessing to his son Asher, at least in terms of result. He said, "Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties." Asher was to live up to his name, and be blessed & prosperous.

This blessing was not unconditional. They would have to work, and do their part to enjoy such prosperity. They would have to plant & cultivate their olive trees. They would have to work hard to harvest the olives. They would then mash the olives with their feet so the oil could be collected. If they would do their part, God will supply the rain, and by a miracle of nature, produce the olives.

I am not a health, wealth, and prosperity preacher. I do not believe that it is always God's will for his people to be healthy & prosperous. However, I do believe that it is God's will to provide for our needs, and at times it is His will to prosper us financially. 3 John 1:2 says, "Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers." Jesus said the labor is worthy of his wages (Luke 10:7). So I believe we can seek application of this blessing today. What may seem strange to some is this: In order to have God's blessing upon your life that will result in prosperity, you must be a giver, not just a taker or hoarder. Prov. 3:9-10 says, "Honor the LORD with your possessions, And with the firstfruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

This blessing is especially needed, for we are living in a bad economy. You could try to make it on your own, or you could seek the blessing of God. Some prosper even in a bad economy. We need more than ever for God to bless us financially, so we can provide for the needs of our families, and give to support the Lord's work. If you are a business owner, or work in a business, pray God's blessings upon that business. If you need a job, pray that God will bless you with a job. And notice how God prospered our church to the point that we have given almost \$27,000 to our Lottie Moon Mission offering! That exceeded our goal by more than 14%!

But you need to do more than pray. You need to work. Thankfully, you do not have to mash olives with your feet, but you need to put feet to your prayers and do your part! Work hard at your job. Make yourself valuable to your employer. As Moses prays for favor upon Asher in the eyes of his brethren, may God grant you favor in the eyes of your employer, or in the eyes of your customers. May your foot be dipped in the oil of prosperity this new year, if you can handle it spiritually.

There is another blessing that I see here:

## II. MAY YOU HAVE PROTECTION FOR THE NEW YEAR

Moses says, "Your sandals shall be iron and bronze." There are two ways to interpret what Moses is saying here. The word translated "sandals" is found only here, so its meaning is not certain. It is derived from the Hebrew verb that means to bolt (Judg. 3:23), and typically refers to bolting a door. Thus, this could be a poetical expression for having a castle or fortress with strong gates that lock to keep out the enemy.

Thus, there would be a connection to the previous blessing. What good is prosperity, if someone can come along & take it from you?

On the other hand, the reference to "foot" in v.24 could have led Moses to bless Asher with another kind of protection. You see, the verb form of the word translated "sandal" not only refers to bolting a door or gate, but it is also used of fastening a sandal in 2 Chr. 28:15 & Ezek. 16:10. So I believe that "sandals" is a legitimate translation. If that's correct, then Moses is praying that Asher have sandals of iron and bronze. These would be shoes that would not wear

out, unlike leather. They would be shoes that would provide excellent protection for one's feet. Of course, Moses is not speaking literally, but figuratively. Such shoes did not exist in that time.

I tend to agree with that interpretation. Asher was to take possession of the NW part of Israel, below Lebanon. Much of that territory was rocky & hilly, especially along the northern coast. Sandals of iron and bronze would be useful indeed!

There is an important implication here. God does not promise that we will tread upon a smooth and easy road. He is well aware that the road we must travel is often rocky and rough. An old saying tells us that we do not go to heaven in silver slippers, and the reason is because the road is rough. But if we look into the Lord, He can provide protection for our feet and a way to travel the road of life successfully and without harm.

If you are going to go hiking over rough terrain, what do you want to wear the right kind of hiking boots? If you were going to climb a mountain, you want shoes equipped with spikes?

Even so, as you walk through life, don't expect God to make the road easy. Instead, trust in Him to provide the equipment that you need for life's journey. I don't know what you will face in 2012, but God does. I believe God is already bringing some experience into your life that will prepare you to face tomorrow. God is also equipping you with the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to help you face trials and temptations. God may have brought someone into your life who will help you face the trials and challenges that are coming. Your church family will be there for you, especially if you stay connected. You can count on God to provide adequately what you need. In fact, His provision is often more than adequate. Do you remember when Jesus fed the 5000? They ate to the full, and there were baskets of leftovers. There was more at the end than when they began.

So may God bless you with His protection for the road you will travel this new year. Now there is yet another blessing in our text:

### III. MAY YOU HAVE POWER FOR THE NEW YEAR

In the last of v.25 Moses says, "As your days, so shall your strength be." Unfortunately, the word translated "strength" is only found here and is obscure in its meaning. Some believe it refers to rest from one's enemies, or leisure, but I will go with the traditional translation. One reason I do so is that this blessing of strength for the challenges of each and every day is certainly consistent with other Scripture verses. It is consistent with the challenge of walking on a rough road.

I want to share a few thoughts about this strength that we need for each day, and how we can gain it from the Lord. First of all, this means:

A. We Need to Recognize Our Weakness - I believe the blessing of God's strength is available only to those who recognize their own weakness. As long as you are self-sufficient, you will be unconnected to the power line of God. Haven't you seen evidence of your weakness on many occasions? How many times have we failed in our duty to God or others? How often has our strength failed during times of suffering? We have grown impatient with our suffering. We complain. We wonder why, & even doubt God's love. Furthermore, how often have we yielded to temptation in a moment of weakness? Sometimes we yield to the same temptations over and over. Where is our strength? Yes, it should be clear to us by experience that we need a power greater than our own.

The apostle Paul was afflicted with some thorn in the flesh. I believe it involved some kind of physical weakness. But Paul later learned that recognizing human weakness is the first step toward experiencing God's power. He said in 2 Cor. 12:10, "Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, ... in needs, ... in distresses.... For when I am weak, then I am strong." In other words, when I recognize my weakness and turn to the Lord for strength, then and only then can we be strong with a power far greater than our own.

So the first step is to acknowledge your own weakness. Have you done that? Or are you still relying on your own strength?

Once you recognize your weakness, then the next step to experiencing the blessing of God's power is this:

**B. We Need to Trust in God as Our Source of Strength -** The one condition of receiving such strength is our faith in the Lord. Look to Him when you need strength for the journey, and for the challenges of life. Stay connected to Him by faith & obedience. Jesus said in John 15:5, "He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Why look to the Lord, instead of yourself or others? God is a reservoir of strength; for He is omnipotent, able to do all things. Believer, till you can drain dry the ocean of omnipotence, you never need to fear that God's strength would run out. The same God who guides the stars in their courses, who causes the sun to burn with such intensity—the same God has promised to supply your strength. Shall He that created the world grow weary? Who divided the Red Sea, and made the waters thereof stand upright as a heap? Who rained fire and brimstone out of heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah? Only God has such power, and He is the One who promises to be the source of your strength.

Do you remember in the story of Moses that God revealed Himself in the burning bush, but the fire was never quenched, and the bush never consumed. Even so, the power of God is never exhausted. And the good news is we may partake of His strength.

No wonder the apostle Paul wrote in Php. 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." So look unto God for the strength you will need to face the challenges & difficulties that lie before you in 2012.

Furthermore, remember this:

**C. We Can Receive God's Strength in accordance with Our Days –** Again, the last of v.25 says, "As your days, so shall your strength be." So often we worry about troubles that never materialize. As for the ones that do, why should we worry? God will give us strength for the troubles and challenges of each day. Some days are sunny and bright, and God only needs to give some strength. The other days are storming, full of trouble. On such days God will give greater strength. If our troubles should become high as mountains, God's grace will become like Noah's flood, that covers even high mountains. On some days God will call upon you to do something for Him that seems impossible. But remember, with God all things are possible. No challenge or duty is too great for God. Do you think it's too hard to witness about Christ? Remember what Jesus said in Acts 1:8, (quote).

Furthermore, you should not expect to receive strength for the whole week on Monday. Live a day at a time, and trust God for the strength you need for the day, and not for the whole week or month. God will not give you strength in advance, but only as you need it. He is not early or late, but always on time!

This is a great truth as we grow old. I have heard people say that growing old is not for sissies. The time comes when your strength fails, and days of sickness or more frequent than days of health. Yet even though we will grow weaker physically, we may grow stronger within. The apostle Paul said in 2 Cor. 4:16, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day." Our spirits may lay hold of God, and as we trust in Him, our strength will be renewed.

You have heard the story of Job. In one day he experienced wave after wave of trouble. He lost much of his livestock, and even his children. Yet somehow he found strength to say, "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21b). The Lord was so pleased with Job. After that great test, He said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job." What a great, God-fearing man!

You have probably heard of the great reformer Martin Luther. He was called before a great council at the city of Worms. They had martyred others. There he was in the midst of armed men and those that sought his blood. There sat fierce cardinals and bloodthirsty bishops; like spiders longing to suck his blood. Yet he cared not for them. He was confident that "God is his refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." So Martin Luther stood before the council and fearlessly proclaimed, "These things that I have written are the truth of God, and by them will I stand till I die; so help me God!"

Conclusion: I pray that 2012 will be a prosperous year for each and every one. I pray that a hedge of protection will surround you. But then again, 2012 could bring great trouble. Do not fret. Remember, "As your days, so shall your strength be." Child of God, cannot you say that this has been true as you look back on your life? I can. [Give examples].

Strength from God only comes to those who have a connection with Him by faith. If you are not yet a Christian, where is your strength? How will you face death? Will you find dying grace? Apart from repentance & faith, you will take that journey to the other side alone. What strength will you have as you stand before a holy God?

Sources: C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture, Vol. 6* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:10] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2011); C. H. Spurgeon's sermon on Deuteronomy 33:25, dated 8/22/1858. Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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