

Numbers 10:29

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[0 : 0 0] I'll turn to Numbers chapter 10, and I think it's sometimes helpful to try and deal with! a big chunk of Old Testament narrative in different ways. A couple of weeks ago we just went through! the passage and then drew some application. Last week we looked at the Passover. And this week I just want to look at one verse, because I think this one verse kind of cracks open the two chapters we read, and it's chapters 10, verse 29. Now let me put that verse in context. Our God has saved the people out of Egypt, and then he numbers them in the early chapters. Remember that, the first census.

And then he arranges them around Mount Sinai. They've been camped around Mount Sinai for probably about a year, and just before chapter 6, sin is dealt with in the camp. They have to deal with sin. And in chapter 6 you have this call to holiness. They consecrate themselves fully to the Lord. They need to consecrate themselves fully to the Lord if they want to know his blessing, because at the end of Numbers 6 says, the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you. That benediction.

And now God is getting them ready to move on. It's kind of on your marks, get set, go. And God says, guess what, I'm coming with you. The people are about to move through the wilderness to the promised land, and God is going to go with them.

And it's a journey that should have taken 11 days, but it took 40 years. And we're going to find out why as we go through the book of Numbers. And then at the end of the book, they are at the edge of the promised land. Are they ready to enter?

You can find that in Deuteronomy. And so here they are. They're poised to move forward. Look at verse 29. And Moses says, And there are beautiful words in the middle of what is not an easy chapter.

[2 : 1 8] And three points tonight. Invitation, instruction, and information. We are setting out for the place of which the Lord said, I will give it to you.

That's what we call the promised land, isn't it? God has promised over and over again to his people, and he's going to give this land. And when God promises this land, he uses some very significant language.

You'll know, don't you, it's the land flowing with milk and honey. How God describes this land, he will give to his people. And in Deuteronomy 8, he describes this land that he's going to give them in churches that are reminiscent of the Garden of Eden.

Let me read you from verse 7 of Deuteronomy 8. Verse 7.

good land he has given you. That's the land it's talking about. It sounds about the place, doesn't it? Until you get there. And I think when the people of Israel actually got into Israel, it must have been such a huge disappointment when they finally arrived.

[3 : 5 2] Because when they got there, what did they find? They found a sandy, arid ridge of hills, a desecrated plateau of warring tribes, and that is Canaan.

I'm one of those Christians, I haven't really got much interest in going to Israel. It's likely a lifelong dream of yours. But from the clips I've seen, it isn't that great, is it?

A land flowing with milk and honey? They must have been terribly disappointed. And now obviously we have to think and look beyond a piece of real estate.

We have to look upon the earthly Canaan and what did that mean? An earthly Canaan is a symbol. It's like a signpost. Sometimes you drive along and there's an old signpost and the paint is peeling off.

It's still a signpost, is it? It's pointing to somewhere. You might not want to take a picture of that signpost, but it's still a signpost. And we need to think of the land as God's signpost that is pointing

to something else.

[4 : 55] That is actually how the Old Testament people saw it. According to Hebrews 11. We're told that the descendants of Abraham go and promise the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and we're told that all these people in Hebrews 11, verse 13, they all die in faith.

They die in faith not having received the famous promise but having seen them and greeted them from afar and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus made it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

If they'd been thinking of that land from which they'd gone out they would have an opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city.

And right at the end of chapter 11 in Hebrews God says that they did not receive what was promised. Since God had provided something better for us. When I was assistant minister the minister used to send me to take a service in the local Alzheimer's unit.

And the services there were great fun. I'd never been hackled like I was hackled during those days. And if you ever take a service in an Alzheimer's unit it's a brilliant thing. You really need a kind of sense of humour doing that.

[6 : 15] I remember praying and I prayed a little bit longer when I opened my eyes most of the audience was undressed when I opened my eyes. There were some amazing things that went on. But there was one man a man called Victor and he was a godly old Pentecostal minister.

And he'd been he'd done Alzheimer's for a long time. And he said this to me once he said I don't know who I am I don't know where I am but I do know where I'm going. Isn't that lovely?

I don't know who I am he couldn't even remember his own name most of the time. He didn't recognize his own daughter he didn't know who he was he didn't have a clue where he was. But God had done a work in his heart and he knew where he was going.

And you see for the Christian home is not so much where you come from. I want to say we should be proud of our roots. I'm proud to be Welsh. I hope you're proud of wherever you come from.

I think it's good to be proud of where you come from. It's good to be proud of our upbringing and our background. And our influences the things that shape us are important. and all those things in God's providence we shouldn't take them lightly.

[7 : 24] God can even take the bad things in our background he can't even use them that we might be conformed to the image of his son. And we need to be grateful for all of that. But what defines us is not where we come from it's where we're going to.

It's like we come from different places different nationalities different backgrounds I wish it was more diverse than it is. But the thing that defines us is not where we come from but where we're going to.

And that's what you see here. That's what Moses is saying to Herobo. We are going to the place that the Lord said I will give it to you come with us. You see clearly for these people wasn't it Canaan was much more than a place on the map.

They were looking for a better country they were looking for a heavenly one. And you can't look at that with long distance and latitude. Kingdom was a type it was a figure and Christ is the fulfilment of that type and figure.

The end of Hebrews 11 he says come unto me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you for I am meek and I am lowly in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

[8 : 35] Jesus is the destination. So when you go to Hebrews 3 and 4 you've got the same thing there. the writer argues that it wasn't actually Joshua that brought the people into their rest.

He says there is a rest that remains for the people of God and that rest is something that we enter by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what Hebrews is all about.

In the book of Philippians the Apostle Paul talks about the upward call of God in Christ. The NIV I think says that God is calling us headwards in Christ and as Christians we are forward looking people.

We are moving forward. We have future and a hope and that's a very significant thing. That should be one of the distinguishing marks about followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It should be the very thing that people latch on to. So they ask us for a reason for the hope that is within us. they recognise that we're not just bogged down in this world and the affairs of this world.

[9 : 43] We have something very big in front of us. The best by far is yet to be. Do you remember what Jesus said to the man on the cross?

He said today you will be with me in paradise. Paradise was lost was it? Because of human sin and rebellion but Jesus said it's that thief on the cross and he was dying on the cross for that man sin and rebellion he says today you will be with me in paradise even restored.

Humanity banished from the garden a cherubim with a flaming sword going in every direction so there's no way back is there for the human race into paradise. You can't get back into the garden of Eden by becoming a vegetarian.

You can't get back into the paradise of God by becoming a Presbyterian. There is no way back into the garden of Eden except and only if that fiery sword of God's anger against sin falls.

There's some lovely verses in Zechariah 13 about a sword that we did to you. Awake O sword against my shepherd against the man who's close to me declares the word strike the shepherd that's what happened isn't it?

[11 : 04] We have a future and a hope because God's fiery sword of indignation has fallen and rebellion has fallen on the shepherd the way is now open for you and I to return to the promised land to the paradise of God because the shepherd has died for the sheep and so we're going to that place about the Lord about which the Lord said I will give it to you now that's for your information it's more than information isn't it?

It's couched very much in terms of an invitation then again in verse 29 Moses said to Hobab the son of Ruol the Midianite Moses' father and all we are setting out for the place of which the Lord said I will give it to you come with us come with us and we will do good to you the Lord has promised good to Israel Hobab doesn't want to come with them he says no I'm going back to my own people my own land and Moses says to him again please don't leave us you know where we can camp in the desert you can be our eyes if you come with us and if you do go with us verse 32 whatever good the Lord will do to us the same we will do to you now superficially as you read it it seems a little bit like nepotism it's a little bit like jobs for the boys after all does Israel really need Hobab to find their way through the world of us one of the things that you notice I hope as we read the passage is the repetition so chapter 9 and verse 17 and whenever the cloud lifted from over the tent after that the people of Israel set out at the place where the cloud settled down and there the people of

Israel came as repeated over and over again the cloud moves Israel moves the cloud stops Israel stops and as they travel through this kind of intractable wilderness where there's every possibility of them getting lost they're not going to get lost because God is going to get them through guide me oh how great Jehovah pilgrim through this barren land and he'll guide them with a pillar of fire and God is going to lead them through a very dangerous wilderness this very hostile territory so why do they need Hobab to be their eyes is Moses swabbling is Moses faith compromised look what it says you know where we should camp in the desert you can be our eyes and Yahweh told in verse 33 so they set out from the mount of the lord for three days journey and the ark of the covenant of the lord went before them for three days to seek out a resting place for them so who's going to find a resting place the ark of the covenant or Hobab is it going to be God with the silver trumpets and the cloud and the pillar of fire will God lead them through the wilderness or will they put their trust in Moses' father-in-law to lead them through the wilderness a man who knows the local terrain and the answer is yes the answer is both they don't cast at each other at all but there's a lesson I think here there's the kind of bad old days when the church kind of sank with the liberalism in the 50s and 60s and the gospel was lost the way that people thought the way to get the glory days back in the church is we need to recruit people and we need to recruit competent people so let's go to the local bank manager let's make him the church treasurer she's a teacher let's get her to teach Sunday school instead of looking for a work of God in their life people would be recruited by their profession or their position or whatever it is of course you know when that happens it's just disaster you could read it that way we need a pair of eyes we need local expertise we need you to know your way around the terrain you know your way around like the wilderness we can do with a man like you but that's not the way that we recruit people for the kingdom

Calvin has got a better explanation of what's going on he says what Moses is doing is he's appealing not so much to Hobab's future usefulness not we can do with a man like you in our church we've got a building project coming up and you're a building project manager we could really do with you none of that sort of stuff but he's appealing to Hobab's past connections with the people

of God don't forget they've been travelling a year out of Egypt to Sinai their camp to Sinai and this man Hobab has been with them and he's an experience of God's dealing with them and Moses is saying you've come so far you've seen so much are you going to go back now why don't you stick with us why don't you come along with us don't stop short of the promised land come all the way you've known our camps in the desert you've seen the pillar of cloud and fire you've heard the sound of the silver trumpets rallying the people you've seen the way the Lord has led his people through the wilderness you've seen the way the Lord has protected us and entered into covenant with us and promised to be present with us why don't you come with us why don't you throw in your lot with the people of God come with us did he

[16:19] I think he did why is that judges chapter 4 verse 11 now he but the Kenites had separated from the Kenites the descendants of Hobab the father in law of Moses and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zanim which is near Canesh in judges they're actually in the promised land and guess what the descendants of Hobab the father in law of Moses are in the land so he must have gone with them he must have taken this invitation let me try to play it maybe you have a connection with the people of God that's why you're here so maybe you've been connected with the church in the past maybe a long time ago and maybe you have seen what God has done in the lives of people you've maybe in the life of the church seen things and you've heard things that you actually can't explain away you've seen that

God is a reality in the lives of his people and you've come so far you can even say that you've tasted of the powers of the age to come you've come in amongst God's people and in Hebrew 6 it describes that it's quite a tricky passage but it's very challenging and really helpful it tells us that you can come in amongst the people of God and you can have really what is an external experience and yet not be truly saved Hebrews 6 4 says for it is impossible in the case of those who have once been enlightened who have tasted the heavenly gift and have shared in the Holy Spirit and they tasted powers of the age to come and then have fallen away to restore them again to repentance since they're crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and they hold him up to contempt you be amongst the people of

God you've heard the word of God maybe during service you've felt the heat of the word of God you've been challenged you've seen things happen and then you walk away and the writer of the Hebrew says you are in danger of crucifying Jesus all over again the difference between a kettle and a saucepan you can boil water in a kettle or you can boil water in a saucepan can't you and there's a difference a kettle you flick a switch there's an internal element you switch it on and it boils a saucepan you put on a hob or a ring and it heats the water but if you take the saucepan away from the heat and the hob the water starts boiling there's a difference you can be like the saucepan on the horn you can be in amongst God's people you can be listening to the word of God you can even experience things you can be moved and challenged you can see what is happening in other people's lives but once you're removed from that you just revert to how you were before you just go back and that is where

Hobart is at at this point he's seen God with his people he's seen God work and do remarkable things and he's decided I'm going back I'm going back to Midian to my pagan roots and Moses is pleading with him don't go back don't go back go on you can come so close and not be there you can taste you can hear you can experience but what you need is something internally you need the spirit of God within you not just the spirit of God coming down upon us there's a difference isn't there and loads of Christians don't get there's a difference between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the fruit of the Holy Spirit you can operate in the gifts of the Spirit and still not be a believer but the fruit of the Spirit means that the Holy Spirit dwells inside you and it produces fruit and love and joy and peace and goodness and longsuffering and kindness and so that's the challenge isn't it the challenge is for you and I tonight am I just a hanger on am I just like hold up I'm kind of externally connected with the people of

God but I'm not indwelt by the Spirit of God and the word for you tonight is don't go back don't go back don't go back when you've seen so much and you've heard so much come in amongst the people of God now I know in saying that there are lots of people out there they've been really hurt they've been damaged by the church and they've had bad experiences because they came in and that is dreadful let me remind you of Chuck Colson's genius quote he said the church is like Noah's ark stench on the inside would be unbearable if it wasn't for the storm on the outside isn't that brilliant that's an extreme way of putting it it doesn't have a free leg it doesn't excuse the bad things

and all the hypocrisy you find amongst God's people sometimes it doesn't excuse that but the stench on the inside would be unbearable if it wasn't for the storm on the outside so let me ask you tonight let me challenge you tonight are you really better off walking away from

[21 : 58] Jesus when you young person you look at the kind of life celebrities and those sorts of things and their life looks so glamorous doesn't it fast lives and fast cars money no object jumping in the other bed it seems to be a wonderful life but is that better than being amongst the people of God C.S. Lewis said God finds our desires not too strong but too weak we're half-hearted creatures fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us like an ignorant child who wants to go making mud pies in a slum because he can't imagine what is meant by a holiday by the sea we are far too easily pleased and that's the point Moses what is he doing here he's pleading with him don't go back don't walk away don't walk away don't go back to your old roots to the mid-year-night way of living come with us we'll share with you whatever good things the

Lord gave us we'll share with you we'll share with you on that journey come with us to the land that God has promised isn't Jesus worth it it's an old table isn't it I'd rather have Jesus than silver and gold I'd rather have Jesus than riches untold that's basically what the message is informs us invites us lastly instructs us and it challenges I think for you and I are guilty silence the majority of our friends and our neighbours and our colleagues they live as if this world is all that there is and we say nothing very often and Moses pleads with his brother-in-law father-in-law and he won't take no for an answer he says come with us what is it that you want for your nearest and your dearest people often say this to me they say he's a lovely boy doesn't believe like we do but he lives better than a lot of Christians he's a lovely boy but he isn't of faith and he lives in a better way than lots of Christians and we want to say to that so what you have a good job a lovely husband they are good things they are good gifts from God but what profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own self and so what so what if you gain the whole world and in the process you walk away from Jesus and you lose your own self and it challenges us to get things in perspective as parents isn't it so what if our kids do amazingly well at school and are wonderfully successful and yet they lose their own soul come with us says Moses to Ealing a bunch of nomads oddballs wandering around the wilderness come with us you're better off with us than out there there are things that you will experience amongst the people of God that you'll never experience out in the world the main purpose of this life is to prepare for the next one

James the brother of Jesus said this in James 4 13 come now you who say today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town we'll spend a year there and trade and make a profit business people let's go and make as much as we can as pretty as we can yet you don't know what tomorrow will bring what is your life for you our mist appears for a little time and then vanishes instead you want to say if the Lord wills we will live and do this or that life is so brief and the purpose of this life is to prepare for the next and these words are a rebuke to our materialism our name very often we fail to point people to the world to come because we're so firmly entrenched in this world and so we've got a credibility problem we might not look as if we're going anywhere we haven't got our bags packed and we need to hold on to the present don't we with a slack hand to be ready to fold our tents to move to the real world lastly there's instruction for us as a church

I think the way to read the bible when you come to the book of numbers is you see what did it mean for them look for Jesus but also look for the church we often don't do that where is the church here and it is the people of God isn't it look what Moses promises Hobart he says verse 29 and verse 32 he says we're in this together there is no place at all for lone Christians we're in this together and we need each other and we need the fellowship of God's people it's all the way through the bible Paul says don't look to your own interest you look to the interest of others isn't that what you see in the wilderness isn't that what Moses is offering Hobart that this mind which is in you in you which was also in Christ Jesus that is how we function what are we inviting people to we are saying to people come with us come and join come and listen come with us that's the offer of Christianity we'll do you good we'll share with you the good things the Lord has given us there may be some here there probably are some here who are thinking twice about going on and he says oh what a good you speak like this but actually life in IPC is not all it's cracked up to be and you may well be disappointed and let down nor is every

[27 : 50] Christian feels like that at some point but I do want to ask you this I want to ask you this question where else would you find people who are genuinely concerned for your welfare where at work your employer your labour where will you find people who are genuinely committed to you

where so let me encourage you to throw in your lot and the people of God and a life of holiness on earth to a home of happiness in heaven one more verse from Zechariah 8:20 it's a great verse Zechariah 8:20 thus says the Lord of hosts people shall yet come even the inhabitants of many cities the inhabitants of one city shall go to another saying let us go up at once to entreat the favour of the Lord and seek the Lord of hosts I myself am going many families and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favour of the

Lord thus says the Lord of hosts in those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew saying let us go with you for we hear that God is with you isn't that where we want to be people crowding you on the tube tomorrow morning ten folk gather around you and they say listen we hear that God is with you can we join it happens in the history of the church it's happening in places in the world today it happened in the book of Acts people who didn't dare join the church and they couldn't help join it and when God is powerfully present with his people that's what happens and when people have a future and a hope and when people live with their bags packed that is when they are most useful in this current world we live like nomads and aliens because we're heading somewhere else and people will ask us one day for the reason for the hope that is in us and at that point we won't have to recruit and we won't have to control and they'll be grabbing hold of us and saying listen we have heard that God is amongst you we've heard you and want to come with you and go with you may God hasten that day let's pray