

# Numbers 32

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[ 0 : 00 ] Number 32. We were at the bank this week for an appointment, and at the bank the woman told us there's lots of uncertainty about Brexit, if you didn't know that.

! Lots of financial uncertainty, aren't they? And lots of warnings that we're facing an apocalypse. No deal will lead to the sky falling in, and all sorts of things. And you'll be worse off because of Brexit. That's not my case to say that that's true or not at all. But I think what we can say is this. A bit of uncertainty is no bad thing for the church.

And a bit of financial uncertainty is no bad thing for the gospel. What we do know is this. Affluence can be deadly.

The Bible is filled, isn't it, in the Old Testament and the New Testament with warning against riches. And in the providence of God, spiritual goods may come, doesn't always come, but may come from economic travels.

[ 1 : 13 ] That's what we should be praying for, isn't it? And there is a case in this chapter. Here are two tribes, the tribes of Reuben and of Gad, and they are doing very well for themselves.

They are prospering materially. They've never had it so good. And yet they're on the verge of spiritual tragedy. And they may, in fact, I think they are inflicting on themselves long-term spiritual damage.

So I want us to think, first of all, of the challenge of comfort. The challenge of comfort. In verse 1. Now the people of Reuben and the people of Gad had a very great number of livestock.

And they saw the land of Jaser and the land of Gilead. And behold, the place was a place for livestock. It's perfectly true.

Apparently the area is well watered. It is fertile. It is green. It is green grazing land. It is 600 metres above sea level. It's perfect cattle country.

[ 2 : 19 ] But there are two words. In verse 1. That should ring some alarm bells for you and I.

Can you see what they are? They saw. It's interesting how those two words are often used together. They saw the land.

And that is often, in the Bible, a bad sign. They saw. It's an indication that somebody is looking at the material rather than the spiritual.

Someone who is walking by sight and not by faith. Someone who is more interested in the visible world. What I can see and touch and taste than the invisible. In the visible world. So we thought with the children, didn't we?

Genesis 3, do you remember? It says, the woman saw. She saw that the tree was good for fruit. As pleasant as the eye.

[ 3 : 17 ] That it was a tree to be desired to make one wise. That is what she saw. And the fact that God has commanded her not to eat of it. How little force compared to what she saw.

Well think about Genesis 13. Which is a passage that's got loads of echoes with Numbers 32. And in Genesis 10, Genesis 13.

Abraham and Lot. Do you remember? They've grown so prosperous. They're going to divide. And Abraham says to Lot. And you choose. And we're told there in Genesis 13. That Lot saw. And Lot saw the plain of the Jordan.

And he acted on the basis of what he saw. And you remember. Actually. It ended up in total disaster. Where Lot chose. And here you see. The people committing the same error. Again.

Their perspective is already wrong. They're living by what they can see. It's easy to make that mistake. Isn't it? To live your life. In terms of the worldly terms.

[ 4 : 18 ] With the values and the pleasures of this world. To make choices. On the basis of what you see. And it's a danger sign. And it leads on to the request in verse 5.

It says. As Moses. If we found favour in your sight. Let this land. The land that we saw in verse 1. Be given to your servants for possession. Don't take us.

Across the Jordan. This isn't the Jordan. And this is on the wrong side of the river. This is the eastern side.

Not on the promised land side. And they decorate. At their request. With really pious language. Look at verse 4. And they describe it.

Don't they? The land that the Lord struck down. Before the congregation. Before the church of Israel. But that isn't what attracts them. It's the pastors. And the springs.

[ 5 : 14 ] And the wealth. You can explain it anywhere you like. And you can use all sorts of flowery. And pious language. But this isn't part of the promised land. This isn't. And part of the inheritance.

That God was going to give them. That lay on the other side of the river. On the west of the Jordan. And to inherit that land. It would take effort. And exertion. And it would take fighting.

And it will take wounds. And bloodshed. And delay. And perhaps. That even more uncertainty. So why bother? Why not. And settle down.

Where they are in comfort. This is a good land. It's good enough for us. And they forget about the greater task. And the richer inheritance. That the Lord had for them. And so their choice.

Is dictated by their possessions. Not by the Lord's promise. That's the challenge. Of being comfortable. And it's the challenge. Of settling down where we are now. And of being satisfied. With what we have.

[ 6 : 11 ] Life is so pleasant. Isn't it? We have so much. Why bother? And it is a bother. Isn't it? It's a bother. With unseen. Demanding realities. That's why the world is so dangerous.

It is attractive. Isn't it? And it's always tempting us. The world is always tempting you. To abandon the adventure of faith. And to put down roots. But the irony is.

The more that we have. The more selfish. And mean and gruff. Than we become. And the more that we have. The harder it is to give it up. As in my experiences. I'm sure it's yours.

That often the people. Who have the least. Are the most outstandingly. Open-hearted and generous. And the people. Who have almost nothing. Will give you everything they have.

That's partly. Christianity. Why it's so unattractive. To people in this country. Isn't it? Politicians don't say.

[ 7 : 13 ] You've never had it so good. But. But that's often the message. The world seems. Good to them. The unseen world. When it seems. Well unreal. And that's why. Sometimes harsher times.

Can be. Times of blessing. For the church. God may remind. Our society. In Jaysicam. That it's very foolish. To lay up treasures.

On earth. Because. It's true isn't it. That moth and rust. Destroy. And thieves break in. And steal. But it's not only. Outside the church. Is it. That we see this mentality.

Wouldn't it be true. To say. That the majority. Of professing believers. In the UK. Seem to be content. With. Living on the wrong side. Of the children. That was a different text.

And. We look at them. They seem to have opted. Out of the battle. Would you describe. The church of Jesus Christ. As striving. That we look more like.

[ 8 : 12 ] Settlers. Than pilgrims. A little enthusiasm. For the things of God. Other things. Have kind of. Taken their place. And so.

Whether consciously. Or unconsciously. Many Christians. Follow an easier path. And they don't abandon. Faith. No. But a way. That is less demanding. And how many.

Professing Christians. Live lives. When you boil it down. That are. Terrifyingly. Self-centered. Piously. Self-centered. Religiously. Self-centered. They do the right things.

Say the right things. But fundamentally. Self-dominates. And so. Let me challenge you. As I challenge myself. Do we see any of them. In ourselves. Are we filled with a holy discontent.

We should be. As long as we're on this earth. As long as we're in the body. There should be a strong. Positive. Holy. Discontent. With ourselves. And with the church.

[ 9 : 15 ] And with the world. Not just when life is hard. That's normal to be discontent. Isn't it? But when life is at its best.

That's the test. Isn't it? So. As one preacher. I heard when I was bringing up. Said. That the greatest test of your faith. Is when there's no test of your faith. Do we know what it is.

To fight in the Christian life. And to pray. And to hope. And to work. And to sacrifice for God. To suffer for God.

And to put ourselves. On the line. In a position of risk. I think that's particularly dangerous. For us. With this building. Which we're so thankful for. But we think.

Well it's okay. We can just kind of take it easy. For a little while. And the danger is. We get far too comfortable. The danger is. We say. Well let this land. Be our possession.

[10:15] And we have to ask the question. Are we in the kingdom at all? So the challenge of comfort. And secondly. The call to commitment. The call. commitment. I do think.

As you read. As Lawrence read this chapter. I wonder. Whether you picked up. What this appalling unbelief. Would have meant to Moses. And verse five. Must have broken his heart.

Wasn't it? And they said. If we found favour in your sight. Let this land. Be given to your servants. For a possession. And here it is. Do not. Take us.

Across the Jordan. Think of that. Think of who they're saying that to. And they say that to Moses. Moses. To Moses. Who in every atom. And fibre of his being. Would have longed. To have been allowed.

To cross the Jordan. But he wasn't. Moses. Who'd been living for 40 years. Across the Jordan. It was the last.

[11:11] And the greatest. Grief of his life. Though. He submitted to it. When God. In judgment. For his disobedience. Said Moses. You are not going to cross the Jordan. And what it cost Moses.

To accept that. Well we don't know. Do we. But yet. Here are a people. And they do not want to go. Across. The Jordan. And it's no wonder. That he rebukes them. Strongly.

For selfishness. Look at verse 6. Shall your brothers. Go to war. When you sit here. He says.

You're showing. I'm no interest. In anyone. But yourselves. It's the attitude. Of I'm alright. Jack. He's travelled. With these people. For a generation.

And now. You are saying. Who cares. What happens. To those people. We have all we need. We're okay. So. Isn't that the danger. For us.

[12:08] Isn't it always. In the life of the church. We ask the question. Well what suits me. I didn't get much. Out of that. I didn't get on with it. What suits my children.

Yes. I'm. I'm not interested. In that. What do I get out of it? But how often. Do we think. Of our brothers and sisters.

And their interests. Even if they're. Not immediately. In your own interests. I don't know. I'm picked up. I saw 122.

We sang it. Isn't it? How pleased and blessed. Was I. And it says. In verse 8 there. It says. For my brothers. And companions sake. I will say. Peace within you.

It's a great line. For my brothers. And companions sake. I will say. Peace. Within you. Why do I want peace. Within the church. Why do I want peace. The psalmist says. For my brothers and sisters.

[13:05] For my companions sake. So. When I'm angry. Maybe I'm justifiably angry. And I'd like to speak out. And speak the kind of. What I need to say.

And sometimes. I'll stay silent. And I'll stay silent. And I'll bite my tongue. For my brothers and my sisters. And my companions sake. I guess words.

I'm going to say. Why will you. Discourage. The heart. Of the people of Israel. From going over. Into the land. That the Lord has given them. Moses says. What will the other try to think. When they see you stopping short. The task is difficult enough.

With everyone involved. But unbelief. Is infectious. And so it's discouragement. And Moses says. Have you learned nothing. About recent history. That the most Satan night.

[14:05] Your fathers did this. For I sent them. From Kadesh Barnea. To see the land. For when they went up. To the valley of Ashkod. And saw the land. They discouraged. The heart. Of the people of Israel.

From going into the land. That the Lord has given them. I often joke. When I'm preaching away. That there are some people. That have the gift.

Of discouragement. That they just. They just managed. To kind of. Get it from the jaws. Of encouragement. And pluck it out. I don't know.

What he said. I'm out here. But. What impact. Are your actions. Moses says. Going to have on your brothers and sisters. This tragedy.

It's about to happen again. It's. Well is everyone going to quit. Look at verse 14. And behold. You have risen in your father's place. A brood of sinful men. To increase still more. The fears and anger.

Of the Lord against Israel. You are.

[15:00] Says Moses. In danger of bringing. God's judgment. On the nation again. In verse 15. For if you turn. And get away from following him. If you turn away from following him.

You know what happened last time. You will again. Abandon them in the wilderness. And you. Will destroy all those people. That's how Moses sees their request. And they.

We can interview that. They would say. And they would say. Well actually. We are astute businessmen. And farmers. We are alert. For a good piece of land. And. This is a good commercial opportunity.

And we want to seize it. But Moses describes them. Do you see it? As a brood of sinful men. And all of this. Is a ringing call. For humble hearted commitment.

And Moses is saying. So in effect. You can't opt out. You can't stay. On this side of the Jordan. You must keep on fighting. You've got to stay. You've got to stay. You've got to stay. You've got to stay with your brothers. Until the battles are over.

[15:56] And the war has ended. You've got to stand. You've got to stand with them. No matter how attractive. The present territory seems. They can't enjoy it. At the cost of the true inheritance. Of the people.

And that is God's call to you and I. Thousands of years later. Am I being selfish. In my life in the church. Am I doing what suits me.

And pleases me. And brings advantage to me. And there is some. Overt persecution in the UK. That's heating up a little bit.

Isn't it? But that is a great danger. In the UK. The great danger in church life. In the UK. Is discouragement. And are you discouraging.

Your brothers and sisters. By half-heartedness. You don't want to. I know that. Nothing you want to do.

[16:52] You don't mean to. The tribes didn't mean to. But Moses says. That's what you're in danger of doing. Okay. What are we saying.

To our brothers and sisters. I was tempted to preach this. This morning. I'm conscious that you guys.

Have made the effort. To come out on a Sunday night. I'm so grateful for that. I'm grateful that you come. And you want to hear. The word God preached. I'm thankful for that. That doesn't mean. This doesn't apply to you at all.

But I am very very thankful. For that. But I do. I do want to say. When we've got no valid reason. For not being at the evening service. Or at the prayer meeting.

At house group. There are valid reasons. For missing. I know that. But when we've got no valid reason. At all. What are we saying. To our brothers and sisters. What are we saying.

[17:47] When we. We show little interest. In outreach. And we never talk to people. About who we're praying for. And we never talk to others. About the gospel. What are we saying. When we show no interest.

In ministry to the young. What are we saying. To our brothers and sisters. When actually. We won't shoulder. The share of Christian service.

When we sit back. In the comfort of our own home. With our possessions. And our interests. And our busy lives. In effect.

What we're saying. By living in that way. Is we're saying. This is a valid way. For Christians to live. It's okay. It's alright. And what happens.

Is gradually. The spiritual temperature. Of the church. Gets cooled. And there's a fog. Of apathy. And discouragement.

[18:42] And to do that. Is to pull other people down. To my level. And when I'm cold. The others around me.

Will grow cold. As well. And I may freeze them. And I may discourage them. And we have to see. That the danger of a half-hearted people. Is that we risk.

The judgment of God. On the whole church. I may be in a camp. In the camp. And God may blight. The whole church. Because of my disobedience. Or compromise. It's a huge price to pay. Is that for personal wealth. And comfort. And these tribes. Are certainly stuck to the heart.

And they respond to Moses challenge. And they promise to lead their wives. And their children. In secure encampments. First. 17 and 18. They say. We will take alms. And we'll be ready to go.

Before the people of Israel.

[ 19 : 36 ] We'll go. The head of the army. We'll be on the front line. We'll be in the vanguard. We'll take the brunt of fighting. We'll not return to our homes. Until each of the people of Israel. Is gaining his inheritance. And it may be tonight.

That we need to repent. Maybe tonight. That we need to go home. And send someone an email. And say. We may need to listen. To Sunday evening's sermon.

And to commit ourselves. Again. To being wholehearted. To realize. Again tonight. That there is no final rest. Is there. On this side of heaven. And there is no early retirement.

For the Christian. And as long as we're on earth. We are. In the battle. And this world is not our home. And we are traveling. To a better country. And so. I urge you tonight. Let that be your resolve.

To say to God. I will fight. And I will spend. I've sat down too long. I will rejoin. If I stop joining in. I will accept my share of the fighting. And I've been taking the kingdom.

[ 20 : 39 ] And the work of the kingdom. In some ways. As a spectator. Sports. If I be a sympathetic onlooker. Well. I'll be so no longer. I'll be a participant. I'll join the fight. The call to commitment.

Reuben and Gad. Commit themselves. So there's a happy ending. For the story here. Well. I'm not so sure. And so I want. To speak. Finally. And briefly. On the cost of compromise.

The cost of compromise. And I want to say. At this. At this point. In the message. I don't think. I can be dogmatic. I don't think. That I can say. With absolute conviction.

That the interpretation. I'm going to give you. Is certainly right. I think it is. I think the heavyweight. Commentators. Are on my side. And I think the whole.

Of scripture. Suggests that it is. But I want to put that question. In your mind. I'm not the Pope. And you need to reflect on this. And you need to think it over yourselves. And you need to make up your own mind.

[ 21 : 37 ] That doesn't mean. That you can just dismiss it. If you don't like it. Right. I mean. It's true. That these. Folk. Did follow through. On their current mental. They were commended. And it's commendable.

They did what they. They did do what they promised. Joshua 4. 12. Tells us. That the sons of Reuben. And the sons of Gad. And the.

Half tribe of Manasseh. They. They passed over. Armed. Before the people of Israel. As Moses had told them. So they did do. What Moses asked them to do. But I can't help believing.

That. That what Moses gave them. Was a reluctant compromise. It was a second best. It was adjusted. For their weakness. Because they're still.

Living outside of the promised land. They were divided. From their brothers. Our geography. Separated them. There was a constant danger. And it is dangerous. To be distant.

[ 22 : 34 ] From your brothers and sisters. Whenever somebody. Gets disaffected. In church life. What happens. You know what happens. And you start to see less of them. And that's always. Always a bad sign. That's the danger.

Of kind of. Faulted communication. Of misunderstanding. Of taking people. And things the wrong way. And that's illustrated. In Joshua 22. Do you remember that incident? The tribes.

Had decided. They were going to build an altar. And there's huge turmoil. Amongst the people. Civil war nearly breaks out. And they were on the wrong side. Of the river. Wires got crossed. And people misunderstood. Each other.

And if you look. Through their history. These tribes. Were always vulnerable. Always vulnerable. And these tribes. Were on the wrong side. Of the Jordan. And they were always at risk.

They were. They were the first. To be attacked. 2 Kings 10. 32. In those days. The Lord God. Began to cut off. Parts of Israel. Hazael defeated them. What parts.

[ 23 : 29 ] Did he cut off? What parts. Were defeated? Well. From. 2 Kings 10. 32. First. From. The Jordan. Eastwards. All the lands.

Of Gilead. The Gadites. The Reubenites. The Nassites. They were the first. To be cut off. They were the first. To be attacked. They were the weakest. And they were.

The most vulnerable. And they were the first. To be exiled. Let me read you. From 1 Chronicles. 5. And verse 26. So the God of Israel.

The spirit of the spirit of Paul. The king of Assyria. The spirit of Chikleth-Polasseh. King of Assyria. And he took them into exile. Namely. The Reubenites. The Gadites. And the half-tribe of

Manasseh. No one else.

The people who didn't cross the door. So when you look at the history of the Bible. When you look at the kind of grand redemptive sweep. And you look from a kind of bird's eye view at this incident. [ 24 : 30 ] I can't believe that this is a good solution. Or a good decision. It was second best. Yes. And they did repent to some extent. And yes. They did obey to some extent. But they stayed where they were.

And they stayed in the land that they saw. And they wouldn't leave it. And I think what you've got here. Is you've got. You've got a case of Psalm 106 verse 15.

Where God says. That he gave them what they asked. But he sent a wasting disease. God does. Very often give you what you ask.

But sometimes it's not for your good. And that's a solemn thought. Because if you are a true believer tonight.

You will not lose heaven. But if you compromise. And you're half hearted. You will lose so much else. So much in this life.

[ 25 : 35 ] So much in the life to come. You'll be vulnerable. Easy to attack. Distant from your brothers. Your life. Will be a might of being. I've seen a very good friend.

He was in a group. When I was in Cardi. We kind of began to do talks. And preach at the same time. And he was by far the most gifted in the group. And yet he's gone into a career.

And he is now. Kind of. In his mid-forties. Kind of. Half hearted. And all of us. Who kind of. Know one another. Will say about him.

He could have done so much. They could have made such a contribution to the kingdom. But they didn't do it. And they could have brought such glory to Christ. They could have known Christ better on earth.

But they didn't. The things of this world. Are nothing. You can lose them in an instant. When changing your brain.

[ 26 : 32 ] Or your heart. Your life has changed. One medical diagnosis. A change in the markets. And it's gone. Why sacrifice eternal blessing? And when we're tempted by the world.

We look. Again. Don't we. To the Lord Jesus. Who had everything. He had everything. And yet. He didn't settle down in comfort. With what he had. He became poor. And he impoverished himself for our sakes.

And he. He went before all the people. He led the battle for our inheritance. He experienced the wounds. He gave himself up unto death. And he didn't even stop until it was won.

And in all the inheritance. Of all the people of God. Were secured. For him. And what in this world. Has value. Compared with our crucified Lord. Seated on the heavenly throne.

His motto. Well it was for the joy set before him. And this word. Calls us. To live. Not for the now.

[ 27 : 36 ] And not for the comforts. Of this life. But for the joy. That is set before us. And may God.

Give us grace. To be an unworldly. Spiritually minded people. Not settlers. But pilgrims. And warriors.

Let's bow our heads and pray.