

### **339 “I have set before you ...”**

In the book of Deuteronomy we are given from the Holy Spirit through Moses “the words which Moses spake unto all Israel on this side Jordan in the wilderness” (from 1.1a, KJV). The book reminds the children of Israel of what their covenant status under the Lord God was to mean for them in practice, which can be expressed in one vital, simple, central truth: follow the Lord and you will be blessed – and vice-versa.

While we are now, through God’s mercy, living under the covenant of grace by faith in Jesus Christ rather than under the covenant based on the law, that same Deuteronomy-truth still holds good today, for individuals, Christian communities and nations. Almighty God has given mankind His written Word in which He explains all that we need to know about Himself and us, about the past, present and future. We ignore His Word at our peril, and to our cost.

Near the end of Deuteronomy, as part of Moses’ farewell words to the people in the knowledge that he himself would not go over into the Promised Land with them (3.23-27 / 4.21-22 / 34.1-8), we read these words – “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil ... I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing ...” (30.15 and 19a). What a poignant scene and what solemn words.

He then spells out five blessings that will arise as the people choose and follow the path of “life and good and blessing” rather than the path of “death and evil and cursing”. The people and their seed will live, not die (30.19b). Their obedience will enable them to love the Lord their God, as they obey His voice and “cleave unto Him” (v 20a). For God IS their very life “and the length of thy days” – that is, He can always be totally trusted. By this obedience the people will be able to “dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them” (v 20b).

As we are well aware, that land is the focus of much distress in our times. After the incessant disobedience of God’s people, culminating in their rejection of Jesus Christ their Messiah, God indeed acted in the way that Moses had foretold, by scattering His people across the earth. It was only in May 1948 that the nation of Israel was reborn (later found to be on the exact anniversary of the start of the Exodus from Egypt in 1639 BC), and in June 1967 that Jerusalem ceased to be “trodden down of the Gentiles” (Luke 21.24b) – two highly significant events in God’s

dealings with His original covenant people. The people of Israel remain at present largely stiff-necked and cut off from “the good olive tree”, but we know from Romans 11 and other passages that God is far from finished with His people (eg., vv 15-32). We have no good reason for assuming that Psalm 122.6-9 no longer applies.

Meanwhile in Britain our next Prime Minister is currently being chosen. We are told that the front-runner, Boris Johnson, has many merits to achieve what the job requires, but we can also see that he has serious faults in terms of his character and lifestyle. He is certainly no Moses-figure! - and as such seems to be a fair representative of the liberal values being so vigorously promoted by the “movers-and-shakers” in our nation.

The issues facing our country are grave, which have arisen in no small part because those at the helm of the nation in politics, education and the media habitually and wilfully reject Almighty God and His Word. They thus lead us along the very path which Moses so clearly warned about, the path that leads on to “death, evil and cursing”. One of the ironies is that, while every step on this doleful path is designed to foster “freedom” and “tolerance”, both of these qualities are actually fading fast from our society as a result.

Are we not seeing signs in all this that the Lord God is judging this nation, to which He has “given much” in times gone by (eg., Luke 12.48b)? Does He not have every right to “fold His arms” as it were, as He allows the inevitable consequences of our national sinfulness to gather pace?

But thanks be to God, the escape from this situation remains right there in both Deuteronomy and the rest of God’s Word! First is our need for deep national repentance, which humanly speaking can only be aroused by bold Christian leadership at every level. Second is our national need to follow once again the old path of obedience to God’s Word and ways, the path that leads to “life, good, and blessing”.

May those two needs continue to feature in our prayers for all in authority, and especially for our new Prime Minister, whoever that may turn out to be.