

369 “Summer is nigh”

The 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by Russian forces in January 1945 is upon us. The very name “Auschwitz” continues to provoke a global shudder at the horrific crimes perpetrated in that camp and the others like it, for the “holocaust” remains both an appalling expression of human sin and the ultimate example of the anti-semitism which we are hearing about once more in our own times.

In Deuteronomy 29.1 we read, “These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb” (KJV). So, in Chapter 30.15-16a Moses speaks thus – “See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil”; the people are commanded to love the Lord, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments. The message is repeated in verses 19-20, “I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, [that] I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live ...”, that choosing of life to involve indeed their loving, obeying, and cleaving to, the Lord.

The consequence of any disobedience on the people’s part is bluntly spelt out in verses 17-18, “ye shall surely perish”. But equally, obedience will surely bring blessing, with particular reference to their being able to live and “dwell in the land which the Lord sware unto thy (their) fathers” (verse 16b and 20b).

We know, from the rest of the Old Testament, how matters duly unfolded for the children of Israel, God’s covenant people. Sure enough, we see how the Lord’s promises through Moses, of blessing for their obedience and judgment for their disobedience, repeatedly came true, with the climax of this recurring cycle coming in the Jews’ wilful rejection of their Messiah. Just as promised, divine judgment – a perishing - came in the form of fearful defeat at the hands of the Roman armies, the destruction of the temple, and the scattering of the Jews as wanderers among the nations (Hosea 9.17).

But even in the midst of these horrors, the Lord God “in His wrath remembered mercy” (from Habakkuk 3.2b), for, again in accordance with His character and covenantal promises, He has stated, “... but with great mercies will I gather thee ... with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer” (from Isaiah 54.7-8).

So, when the new covenant of grace came in, centred on the Person and work of the Lord Jesus, with the proclamation of this newly-revealed Gospel being entrusted to the Church, the Holy Spirit gave us, through the Lord Himself and through Paul, two key promises concerning the Lord's continued covenantal relationship with the Jews: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled" (Luke 21.24b); and, "that blindness in part happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11.25b).

Twice in those promises we have the word "until", showing that a time will come when the Lord's main emphasis will switch away from the Church and the Gentiles and back to His dealing directly with the Jews once more. The event known as "the Rapture", the snatching-away of the believing Church, the true "body of Christ" (I Thessalonians 4.13-18 and I Corinthians 15.51-52) is the most likely indication that this promised change of the Lord's emphasis will have occurred.

We know there then will follow the terrible 7-year period culminating in "the great tribulation" (a re-run of Daniel's 70th week, Daniel 9.25-27, the first occasion of which, AD 26 – AD 33, God the Father has cancelled in His reckoning because of the rejection of His Son). This re-run will be a time of fearful judgment on the Jews, the unbelieving Gentiles and the apostatised Church (Revelation Chapters 4-19).

Finally the Jews will cry out to the Lord for His mercy and deliverance, and, praise God, "they shall see the Son of man (their true Messiah) coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (egs., Zechariah 12.9-10 / Matthew 24.30), whose long-prayed-for kingdom will then be established on this earth (egs., Matthew 6.10a / Revelation 20).

Jesus concluded His words about the end-times with "a parable of the fig tree", a scriptural symbol of the Jews: when its branch is tender and its leaves are being put forth, we shall know that "summer is nigh" (Matthew 24.32-35). Since the times of these scriptural promises the holocaust has happened as a terrible divine "wake-up call" to us all, and, against all possible human odds, the Jews, though as yet largely in unbelief regarding Jesus as their Messiah, have returned to part of their promised land.

As Christ-redeemed members of the New Covenant awaiting the Rapture, we earnestly watch, pray, warn and explain, for we can surely see from God's dealings with the Jews that "summer is nigh".

