

382 A Special Rod, A Special Sceptre

After the spies returned from their reconnaissance of Canaan with a gloomy report, (not shared by Caleb and Joshua, Numbers 13.17-33), an ugly mood spread among the people. Deep anger was expressed towards Moses and Aaron, and hence towards God Himself, coupled with a resolve to return to Egypt (14.1-5). Matters came to a head in Chapter 16, with Korah, Dathan and Abiram publicly challenging the authority of Moses and Aaron. Tension steadily rose (16.1-22), and finally the Lord God had had enough and judged these rebels severely, publicly and finally (16.23-35).

The people saw very directly that “the Lord is the Lord” and is never to be messed with, which serves as a useful reminder for those of us coming long afterwards. While, by God’s mercies in Christ, we are now under the covenant of grace, God’s holiness, righteousness and supreme authority continue today entirely as they were on that fateful day of judgment in the wilderness. He remains now, just as He was then, the God of love (I John 4.8b), but He is not to be mocked (Galatians 6.7 / Exodus 20.1-7). We know very well, from Scripture, history and perhaps also from personal experience, that eventually, if His patience, warnings and - for us today - His Christ-Gift, are all spurned, the Lord God judges sin, in whatever form it comes, as firmly as He deems necessary. That is a truth sorely neglected in the pulpits, parliaments and public debates of today.

We might think that after seeing the terrible fate of Korah and the others the people would have “got the message”, but no, back they came. In Numbers 16.41 we read of their extraordinary accusation against Moses and Aaron, “Ye have killed the people of the Lord” – a further blatant challenge to the Lord and to the men He had appointed to rule over his covenant people. This time the Lord set up a simple experiment, of twelve rods, one for each of the twelve tribes, with the rod for the tribe of Levi bearing the name of Aaron (17.3); “And Moses laid up the rods before the Lord in the tabernacle of witness” (v.7). Next morning Aaron’s rod, alone, had budded, with buds, blossoms and almonds (vv.8-9) – a “no-more-nonsense” sign from the Lord of His appointment of Moses and Aaron, whose authority was to be respected, along with the authority of the Lord God Himself.

Last week we saw how the “Rod of the Lord Jesus” budded as it were in resurrection, before the Risen Lord ascended to His Father as “the sheaf of firstfruits”. Elsewhere in God’s Word Jesus is associated with another

sort of rod, when we read in Genesis 49.10, as part of Jacob's blessing upon Judah – "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah ..."; and then again, in Numbers 24.17, in the words of the flawed prophet Balaam (who, even so, heard some things aright under the Lord!) – "... there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel".

The rod of Aaron was blessed with divine approval, as was, and is, the Rod and Sceptre that is Jesus Christ (and, egs., Matthew 3.16-17 & 17.5 / II Peter 1.17). This is where this wayward world finds itself right now, in the midst of this Covid-19 virus that is being allowed to run by Almighty God as a gracious but clear warning and call to return to Him while there is still opportunity. Like those Israelites, are the people and nations of this world going to accept the authority of the One, true, living, Almighty God, and His Appointed One, His own Son Jesus Christ? Or not?

To put it another way, what names would be written on any eleven rods of today, that were placed alongside the twelfth rod bearing the Name of "Jesus Christ is Lord", in the Lord God's "tabernacle of testimony"? Each of those eleven rods currently acts as a Korah, Dathan or Abiram, challenging God Himself and His Appointed One, and awaiting, without caring or realising it, the divine verdict as to buds, blossoms and almonds. Any of us can no doubt supply some names for those eleven rods, but whatever the names, they all have one thing in common, a plain rejection of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Humanly speaking, the divine message underlying this Covid-19 virus is highly unlikely to be heeded. The day will come however when it will be heeded, when, praise God, "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow ... and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (from Philippians 2.10-11).

The tragedy is that for so many their eventual bowing and confessing before Christ the Lord will have come too late. How we need to pray, and act, that God the Father's Appointed One, His Sceptre, His only Son, will be accepted for who He really is, while there is still time.

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