

Sermon – 09/07/2006 am

Covenant Blessings

Study Text: Deuteronomy 28:1-14

The children of Israel were God's chosen people. Why did God choose these people to be his special people, a holy nation, *high above all nations of the earth* (26:19, 28:1)? Was it because they good living and upright people? Was it because they were young and full of energy? Was it because they were rich and could help God in advancing his kingdom? The Israelites were neither powerful nor rich. They were nothing in the eyes of the world, mere slaves when God chose them. Moreover they were a stiff-necked people always rebelling against God. God chose them because he chose them. *God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy* (Exodus 33:19).

For what purpose did God choose Israel? Were they leaving one taskmaster to become the slaves of another? Would God be a malevolent ruler or would he be benevolent? Most rulers of men seek to lord it over the people – and so the gods that men invent behave in the same way. But the true God chose them to do them good, to bring them into a good land where they would prosper. He gave them commands to order their lives.

But in the end, God being the God of heaven and earth, he chose them to be holy to himself, to be a nation that would bring glory to him. They would be a nation bearing the name of the 'Lord your God' and witnessing to the whole world of his greatness and his glory. Indeed *all the peoples of the earth...shall be afraid of you* (28:10).

In his grace God made a covenant with these people. He promised to be their God, the God who protected them and provided for them in every way. They were required to obey the commands of the Lord their God, to worship him exclusively and wholeheartedly. This covenant was clearly stated and declared to all the people and they agreed to obey.

As with any covenant or agreement there were sanctions for breaking the covenant. When the covenant was made at Sinai blessings and curses were included in the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20). In Leviticus 26 we find a long list of promised blessings if they obeyed the covenant, and an even longer list of curses if they disobeyed. In this lengthy chapter of Deuteronomy we find parallel lists as Moses led the people in covenant renewal.

Almighty God is powerful to bless his people, and he will bless those who listen and obey his voice. God desires good not evil, peace not war, and hope not dismay for his people (Jeremiah 29:11). Ways in which the Lord will bless his people are outlined in the passage before us.

All Places

Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country 28:3. The blessing of God was not limited to any particular place. The people did not have to go to some holy place to receive God's blessing. They went to the central sanctuary to worship but not necessarily for blessing. The Lord their God was not only omnipotent but omnipresent. He was not confined to any particular place. The people could call upon him anywhere and he would hear and answer them.

We can call upon the Lord in any place. We do not have to go to some shrine or make a pilgrimage to some distant holy place in order to receive the Lord's blessing. Muslims are compelled to go on pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their life, while Hindus are always going on pilgrimage to some holy place. Christians do not need to go on pilgrimage to a holy place to receive divine blessing, although many are taught otherwise by church leaders.

All Works

The second blessing, and the three which follow, are basically blessings on *the work of your hand* (28:12). Increase or productivity was the mark of God's blessing. They would have many children, and their flocks and herds would increase. Their crops would yield well, with the result that their basket and kneading bowl would be filled. *The Lord will grant you plenty of goods* (28:11).

When you think of a man so blessed by the Lord, who do you think of? Job was so blessed that he was the greatest man in the East. God allowed Satan to take it all from him, but then we are told *the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning* (Job 42:12). He had much bigger herds and flocks, and many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. God is powerful to bless.

The Israelites were agrarian folk – they lived off the land. They did not have access to supermarkets where they could buy every imaginable food. They ate the produce of their own land. The productivity of their fields depended upon many factors, all under the control of the Lord. They needed rain and sunshine, freedom from pests and diseases, and security from the raiders. Rain at the right time was essential for their crops. The Lord promised to *give the rain to your land in its season* if they obeyed his commands (28:12).

Is the Lord blessing the work of your hands? You may work in an office and get paid each week whether it rains or not. You may go down to the supermarket and buy your food with little thought to the rain and sunshine which the Lord sent to produce that food. But ultimately what you eat has come from a crop somewhere in the world, and without rain that crop would not have grown. Moreover, your own work even in an office is dependent upon the blessings of the Lord. Whatever your work it will not be without potential problems or failures.

Blessings under the new covenant, as we will see shortly, extend beyond the material things that we see here, but the Lord still promises to *supply all your needs* (Philippians 4:19). Your heavenly Father knows what you need said Jesus, while speaking about food and clothing. He went on to say *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you* (Matthew 6:33).

Note that it is needs not 'greeds' which the Lord promises to supply. You may have ungodly neighbours with more material things than you have but do not envy them. *Do not worry about tomorrow* Jesus went on to say. Even the media today sometimes lets down its guard to tell us that people with fewer things are often happier. Most of the time it is urging us to buy more so we will be happy!

Possessions could be very fleeting in Israel, as in our own society. Enemies could come at any moment and take them away. The Lord promised his people they would defeat their enemies if they obeyed his covenant commands (28:7). In fact all peoples of the earth would be afraid

of them because of their God (28:9). Many a rich person has not been able to sleep well for worry about his possessions. Those blessed of the Lord will have all they need and this will enjoy the peace of God.

All Time

Blessed shall you be when you come and blessed shall you be when you go out (28:6). This blessing has reference to time. It points to a blessing that continues day and night, and continues all the days of your life. The eternal God has power to bless his people for ever and ever. He will not forget them or the covenant he made with them. He warned the people not to forget the Lord their God and turn to other gods (8:19). They may turn and become unfaithful, but the Lord will remain faithful always (28:14).

The words of verse 6 remind us of the familiar words of Psalm 121. This Psalm tells us that *the Lord does not slumber or sleep. He preserves your coming in and your going out from this time forth and forever more*. While Baal, the god of the Canaanites, may sleep or be otherwise occupied when his followers need him, Elijah showed that the God of Israel is always ready to hear the prayer of his people and to bless them. You do not have to wait to some holy day or festival in order to receive the Lord's blessing.

Blessings Today

What does all this mean for us today you may be asking? We are living under the new covenant you may say. If you do then that is great, for many do not see this clearly. They think that Christians will be blessed with material prosperity.

But look at the very first sermon of Jesus (Matthew 5). He gives a list of blessings as if in response to these before us in Deuteronomy 28. We have six here, while Jesus gives nine blessings. Jesus proclaimed blessings on those who not only obeyed the voice of the Lord, but who are moved in their hearts to humble themselves, to mourn over their sins, to seek righteousness, and to suffer persecution for the name of the Lord.

The blessings proclaimed by Jesus are not prosperity and security in this world. He promised heavenly blessings, an inheritance in the kingdom of God and fellowship with God himself. These blessings belong to all truly believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. In Jesus Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ (Ephesians 1: 3).

We are chosen by divine grace just like the children of Israel, but our covenant blessings extend beyond this world. We are promised an eternal inheritance and heavenly blessings which go beyond land and material blessings that were promised through Moses, and demonstrated in the life of Job.

Sadly some Christians look to such material blessings as if they were living under the old covenant. But in Jesus Christ we have spiritual blessings that far outweigh any earthly blessings. So *set your mind on things above not on things of the earth, for you died and your life is hid with Christ in God* (Colossians 3:2, 3).

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