

APRIL 5

Deuteronomy 28

Notice the proportion of verses given for the blessing and the proportion given for the curse. What does that tell you? Zig Ziglar said, "The fear of loss is greater than the desire for gain." It seems that God might believe that too. It is also interesting in the NT that hell and judgment are spoken of quite a bit. If this is what they said out loud in the ceremony of the blessings and the curses, I'll bet it ended with a sense of shock.

Look for key verses for why God will bring the curse on them.

Vs. 1-14 The blessing.

Vs. 1-6 This is the personal blessing to the nation and individuals.

Vs. 7-14 This is their blessing in relationship to the nations. Even though much of this is a benefit to the people, it will be viewed by the nations. Israel will be the witness to the world of the benefits of serving and worshiping Yahweh. During the Millennium, this will be fulfilled.

V. 14 This is a verse of warning, and the key to the blessing and curses is given. There is no neutrality in life. All mankind, even atheists, are always worshiping something. Worshiping other gods would unleash God's wrath.

Vs. 15-68 The curse.

Vs. 15-19 This is the general, personal curse. This section is parallel to vs. 1-6. Now it gets worse.

Vs. 20-24 This looks like an explanation of how God will make their personal lives loathsome, by cursing the ground and their health. It almost looks like the curse on Adam.

Vs. 25-35 This is their curse in relationship to the nations. What I find interesting is that vs. 28 and 34 describe how God will allow their misfortunes to drive them mad with despair.

Another interesting note is that Isaiah refers to this section (actually God does it) in Isaiah 55. The references to nations that are not known in vs. 33 and 36 are used by Isaiah to describe the blessing of what will happen when Israel follows the Lord in the future.

Vs. 36-44 This seems also to amplify how God will show the nations that Israel is under God's curse.

Vs. 45-51 Israel hasn't even entered the land, and God is already telling them of foreign domination and the coming of Babylon to take Israel into exile.

Vs. 45-47 These verses summarize the reason God will remove them. Isn't it interesting that it kind of boils down to the people not serving the Lord with joy and gladness.

Vs. 52-57 We will read of this happening when Samaria is besieged (2 Kings 6:24-7:20). Although this happened in Jerusalem too, we have no similar eyewitness account, but then, Jeremiah was, thankfully, in prison; or the people might have eaten him too.

Vs. 58-63 Now God is revisiting their history of salvation from Egypt. God will curse them as He cursed Egypt.

Vs. 64-68 The key here is the last verse. Even if they were to go back to Egypt, Egypt wouldn't want them. Oddly enough, there will be a group of people who escape to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. In a way, they bring the curse with them and God sends Babylon into Egypt to destroy that country and punish the Jewish exiles.

Both the blessing and the curse are the active work of God. I have met some people against whom, it has appeared to me, God's hand was set not to let them get up. I discussed this with one

of these people, because I had never known the Lord to be this hard. My concern was that he had done something awful, and the Lord wasn't letting him get up until he repented, confessed and in all ways possible, made peace with God. The stuff that tumbled out on the table was interesting, and it explained why all the money that had been given to this person to help him make a new start had accomplished nothing. Interestingly, it wasn't one event, but rather, a heart that constantly would not trust God. I still don't know about the other case. God showed favor and kindness to the worst people in the Bible when they repented and humbled themselves before Him. That's the key.

These curses seem very hard and very theoretical until you read the pages ahead, from Judges to the end of Malachi. We will see God constantly trying to help Israel, and the people will constantly resist and rebel. God's judgment always seems harsher in the theoretical, as it did to Jeremiah, but when you are working in the harvest with the future recipients of that judgment, you understand that God's judgment is just, as Jeremiah did.

Luke 11:14-36

In the reading for yesterday, did you notice what Jesus was doing just prior to the disciples asking Him how to pray? Apparently Jesus took time every day to get away from the disciples, a stone's throw, and do it Himself.

Luke 11:14-26

You might think we've read this before in Matthew 12:24 and in Mark 3:22, but this is different. In the second year of Jesus' ministry the scribes and the Pharisees had come up with an explanation for Jesus' power and signs. Now, months before His death, the sickness the Jews (Jewish leaders) spread is being expressed by the people themselves. What we have here is coming out of the mouth of the people.

I'm sure that Jesus gave this message to others in different settings. Although what Jesus says here is very close to Matthew 12, there are some interesting differences.

Vs. 14-23 This is very similar to what Jesus had said to the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 12 and in Mark 3. What is missing here is the mention of the unforgivable sin.

V. 22 The telling of this parable is a little different. Jesus adds to this by including the mention of armor. Since the figures of speech mirror reality, I wonder what the *armor in which he trusted* was?

Vs. 24-26 When Jesus told this earlier, it seemed like He was applying it to the entire generation. In any case, this seems to be a description of reality in the spiritual world. Even among the demons, having rebelled against God's purpose for them, it could be that they can't be completely free of human connection since they were made, back when they were angels, to serve God by serving us.

Vs. 27-28 I wonder if this outburst was to change the subject since Jesus was talking about something "nasty." This expression of religious sentimentality created a nice bridge into talking about the importance of hearing and doing Jesus' words.

Vs. 29-32 Jesus was asked several times to show a sign specifically to prove He was the Messiah. Here it had come from the crowd, but He gave the people His standard answer. Notice that in one example, the hearing of the Word is emphasized; and in the other example, the response to the Word is the main point.

V. 33 When Jesus has used this before, it has been with the disciples and the focus has been for them to spread the Word. Here with the people, the focus is that they themselves should use the light. There still is the aspect of the light being for others.

Vs. 34-36 When Jesus used this before with His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, it had to do with their perception of value. Here, for the people, it seems that the focus is on them understanding Him, His Word and the times. If they get this right, there is light. If they warp their perception of Him, they will not only be blind, but will also be full of darkness.

This last warning was directed toward the people and the religious leaders. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:23), Jesus used this same illustration to warn His disciples that it could also happen to them. There's no better way to keep your eye clear than following Him in the harvest and using the truth for what the truth was meant to be used, for reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalms 77

This is a good psalm for strength in waiting on the Lord. Since I'm in a time of waiting, this really lets me know that these feelings are normal and understood by God and that I need to wait well, in hope, knowing that my heart is being strengthened in the waiting. God says to keep on crying out, not to be comforted by anything other than God's answer. The psalmist looked to an example of God being gracious and kind to the most undeserving, and showing favor to stubborn people. The idea is, "If He did it for them, He'll do it for me too." In that example, God used His power and shook the elements for these people. Isn't it funny that the people and the event that the psalmist took comfort in is the same stuff we're reading in the OT? Note v. 20.

Vs. 1-3 It doesn't matter who you look at, Job, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, or anyone in between; this is how we are to pray. God seems to specifically move those who are following Him in His plan into situations where they learn to cry out. In Luke, Jesus doesn't just teach the words by which to tune our hearts in prayer; He gives us two very important stories of persistence in crying out to God. I feel more and more comfortable being in places like this in following Christ, because this is normal and it means that the Lord has led us to this very spot of crying out.

Vs. 4-9 It seems that Asaph realized that God would give him no rest or easy solution. So in v. 5, Asaph turns his heart and mind to the Lord. What gave him strength was remembering that character of God as revealed in Scripture. His steadfast love never ends. His promise to Abraham will never fail. God doesn't know how to hold back His grace and His compassion.

V. 10 This is Asaph's breakthrough. The right hand refers both to power and righteousness.

Vs. 11-15 This is why the Word is so important to us. It is the basis of our remembering the love, power and holiness of God. In v. 13, God is the only God and the holy God. In v. 14, He is the God who is mighty beyond everything and who reveals Himself. In v. 15, He is the promise-keeping God who redeems. By the way, this would preach well.

Notice the mention of Jacob and Joseph. This tips you off that what Asaph is remembering is what happened to Israel being led out of Egypt. Isn't it interesting that in Deuteronomy, God is telling Israel they should never forget these very same things. His holiness, His power, His promises, and their salvation should always be upon their hearts. Is that any different for us?

Vs. 16-20 And here are the acts in Egypt and the Exodus that Asaph is remembering.

Proverbs 12:18

It takes confidence and personal depth in God's love to have the steadfastness and gentleness to speak the truth in love. Anybody can wound. I think I'm getting there, but some days, I'm still the other guy.