

**CHICHESTER CATHEDRAL**  
**SUNG MATTINS**  
**10.AM SUNDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2010**  
**Deuteronomy 28 1-14. Acts 28 27-end**

Most of us read a daily newspaper. And I suspect each of us have a special way of reading that paper. The sportsman will turn to the sports pages, the feminists will turn to the special articles on fashion, some will turn to the latest scandal reports, some will read the headlines and give a cursory glance to the rest of the news. Some will always turn to the leader column and the correspondence pages; some will turn to the crossword puzzle. And I confess that one of the most fascinating pages of my daily paper are the obituary columns and especially the written obituaries. And what qualifies one for a written obituary may simple be an entry in 'Who's Who', or simply an entry judged to be of sufficient national interest. They all make fascinating reading. And it is quite clear that national newspapers have very large files of obituary notices prepared before hand in the likely event of someone's demise. And when you read those accounts they make fascinating reading. Often what is not said or hinted at in the private and public lives of famous people, indicates more than the eye can see, and this is often done with great tact and diplomacy, it needs to be so.

This is said apropos of our scripture readings this morning. We listened to the last verses of the Book of Acts. It comes to an end with a shout of triumph. It is the peak of Luke's story. Now the tale is finished, the story that began in Jerusalem rather more than 30 years ago has finished in Rome, the capital of the world. In the beginning there were just a score of adherents, now they numbered in tens if thousands. It was not the purpose of Luke to tell what happened to Paul and his martyrdom. Like the obituary notice what is not said is also important

So it is with our reading from Deuteronomy on which I wish to concentrate this morning. Our first lesson contained fourteen verses concerning the blessings of obeying God. But again it is what is not read this morning, but like the obituary notice, is equally as important. For the next fourteen verses are curses of disobeying God. They should be read together. They form more or less an exact parallel to the fourteen verses of the blessings. They indicate that where prosperity has been promised, there will be adversity. The special element in these curses is the plagues, which shall afflict Israel brought by disobedience.

So what meaning has the reading for us today? It must be said they mirror the happiness and affliction that we experience in our earthly pilgrimage.

Where the chapter has its justification is that in the end its presupposition is that to obey God brings blessing, to disobey him brings curses and this is absolutely right. But we need to probe a little deeper. Indeed this morning I want to go beyond the assertions of our reading. Firstly we need to acknowledge we do need the help and blessing of God when the blessings and curses of life come upon us. For here there is a spiritual truth to tease out. The blessings of life, if not handled aright, may sap our moral fibre and frustrate our purposes, and God's purposes more than any obvious curse would do. And conversely the curses of life, if used aright, may lose quite a large part of their sting, and may even yield a positive blessing if handled aright. We all experience good coming out of adversity. With God's help both the blessings and curses of life may lead us nearer to our true life, which is hid with Christ in God as Paul puts it in Galatians.

The Book of Deuteronomy ends with a most solemn warning against disobedience. The Book of Deuteronomy believes, as we have seen, that suffering is directly the result of disobedience to God and that prosperity the result of obedience to God. The deuteronomic historian has not learnt that men may inflict evil on others because of their goodness, and that good men may need voluntarily to accept suffering for the sake of others. And we need to acknowledge that the vindication of the good and the defeat of evil is only partially seen in this life.

And there is a spiritual danger in the deuteronomic historian's belief that prosperity is directly the result of goodness. For the deuteronomic historian urges Israel to love and obey God for his own sake. The prosperity, which this will bring, is only ancillary. The spiritual danger is that stress on the immediate reward may be turned into the main motive. The reward is incidental to the love of God and the response of love of man for God.

To sum up, in our experience of life we must recognise that we all play as individuals a large and often more immediate part in determining prosperity or adversity than is recognised by the deuteronomic historian. We learn from the experiences of the Israelites in exile; from the experience of an individual sufferer like Job and above all from the fact of the Crucifixion. We learn that we cannot always ascribe adversity and suffering to the wrath of God. As Christians we believe that the voluntary acceptance of suffering and death may be necessary to fulfil the call of God.

So in our understanding we have moved on, we have built on the view of the deuteronomic historian, because life in all its trials and tribulations is undergirded by the power and redemptive love of God, seen through Jesus Christ, who through his love has redeemed us to a life beyond our deserving expectation and hope.