

UK ELECTION 2017: ISSUES ARISING

At times events fall out in such a way that they can be seen to embody a message for mankind. It was so in the days of Daniel when Nebuchadnezzar the king had his supernatural dream. It was about a mighty tree to be cut down right to the stump. The dream closed with the words, 'This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: *to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will...* (Daniel 4:17). These words have a timeless message.

Political Comment

Elections produce a great deal of opinion and comment but there is a difference between the facts and *knowing* the facts. This dream and its fulfilment was 'to the intent that the living may know' the truth that God is in control. By God's providence his sovereign decree is carried into effect. Expert analysis, these days, is concerned with secondary causes and does not penetrate to *the* determining cause of events. Our analysts today are like those of ancient Nebuchadnezzar who could not get to the root of the matter. All the wise men of Nebuchadnezzar were not able to make known the interpretation of the dream (Daniel 4.18). We do not claim that all analysis of secondary causes is useless but we do maintain that the most important consideration is that God has acted and we need to lay to heart what he has done and how we are to react.

God at work

In every generation God is at work by his providence in the government of nations determining who will have power. Though million's of voters participate at the ballot box, God's sovereign will determines the outcome. A General Election is a time of change. Some politicians lose their seats and other candidates take their place. It all depends how the votes are cast. The Bible goes further in its analysis. 'The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord' (Proverbs 16.33). Few bring God into elections these days. Its all about persuading the voters. A fortune is spent on it but each man's heart is acted upon by God. What seems the ultimate example of a chance happening, the aggregate of thousands of individual votes, is in fact the hand of God. This truth calls politicians and electorate to reflect upon what has happened. What significance is to be attached to things as they now stand?

The need for humility in rulers

Before any jump to condemn God, as many do on the basis of half truths, let us remember that God's afflicting Nebuchadnezzar, with this known disease where a man thinks himself an animal, was an act of compassion. It had a remedial intent for Nebuchadnezzar's rectification in his imperial government. He was to acknowledge this eventually (Daniel 4.34-37). Unwelcome events put us on a learning curve. Two thousand years ago the Saviour put the record straight to woo sinners from self confidence and self dependence (Matthew 6.25-30). Even the smallest details of life are in the hand of God. Mysterious indeed but Nebuchadnezzar was to learn that it applies to kings and kingdoms and that it is becoming to reject arrogant self-confidence and walk humbly even in the affairs of state.

Hard chestnuts

There are three pressing issues for the UK which did not trouble Nebuchadnezzar, namely, home security, public finance, and international trade. At the time of his dream and for a year afterwards Nebuchadnezzar was very comfortable. He could say, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?" (Daniel 4:30). He was safe from terrorists, wallowed in wealth and enjoyed the produce of many kingdoms. Despite all the undoubted benefits that the UK enjoys our Government faces the challenges of terrorism at home, strain on public expenditure and debt because of mounting social expectations, and Brexit negotiations. We are in great need of social consensus on these matters but it does not exist at present.

Religious Toleration

We observe that Daniel with his comprehensive commitment to Biblical faith and practice was still in public office. By this time Nebuchadnezzar had come to a better understanding of tolerance than when he had Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego thrown into the fiery furnace. Indeed Nebuchadnezzar had been deeply impressed with the faithfulness of these Jews to their God and confessed it saying, 'Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God' (Daniel 3:28). All rulers are on a learning curve and one might expect that our Conservative government, having now lost its majority and finding itself dependent for governing on the DUP (a party founded on Christian principles), would see the hypocrisy of not reviewing legislative provisions for people of conscience. We have witnessed grave injustices with respect to Christian conscience in business, the public sector, universities and in the public square in the case of open air preaching. It would be a shameful thing if a contemporary British government were to lag behind a pagan despot in such basic toleration, pretending that conscientious action is some form of prejudice or hatred.

Eschatological urgency

While politicians pursue objectives dictated by the expectations of their constituents the divine clock is still ticking according to the divine timetable. The judgement on the great Nebuchadnezzar, the 'head of gold' (Daniel 2.37-38), is a reminder to all that judgment is always coming. There is a seriousness to this message for kings and all that are in authority. Rulers often oppose Christ as did Caiaphas, Herod and Pilate but the question of Psalm 2 remains relevant, 'Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion (verses 1-6). The exhortation at the end of the Psalm 2 points to what is any ruler's true wisdom, 'Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him (Verses 10-12).

Christian duties

The election is over. Things have changed but what are believers to do? The example of

Daniel suggests three important Christian duties.

A. Daniel stood fast (v.19-22)

We might expect the new moral agenda to rumble on as long as our present P.M. continues. She sees it as a crusade for justice and fairness and knows not that God is against it and the oppression of Christian conscience. Believers must stand fast. Paul often exhorts to this as in 1 Corinthians 16.13, 'Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong'

B. Daniel was faithful

Daniel was ready to give an unpopular answer to faithfully interpret God's revelation (Daniel 4.23-26). His hesitation (Daniel 4.19) resulted from the severity of the message but he was still prepared to deliver it but not in anger or callousness. He seeks to prepare Nebuchadnezzar for the bad news.

C. Daniel gave compassionate counsel

It is observable how respectful Daniel was. Even under these circumstances of oncoming humiliation Nebuchadnezzar was still the ruler and entitled to that submission of which Paul speaks in Romans Chapter 13.1-2. Doubtless politics is important and new laws are more and more impacting upon the faith and practice of Christians. We should keep informed, pray and write to our M.P.s with discretion. But above all, what a thing it is to be straight about eternal things. What an exhortation Daniel pours out from his loving heart: 'Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by shewing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity' (Daniel 4.27). How these words must have come back to Nebuchadnezzar. Would he not think, what a fool I have been! Why did I not listen to Daniel? Let us have a word in season.