

Brexit. What next?

Vote leave supporters seemed as surprised as everyone else that Britons had decided to exit the EU. At the time of writing this article no asteroid strike had taken place. Even the rumbling Icelandic volcano failed to erupt in disgust. There was no earthquake. Or was there an earthquake? In Revelation 11.13, we read, 'And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven'.

A great 'earthquake'

There has been no geological earthquake in Britain but there has certainly been a metaphorical earthquake that rumbles on. Amidst the leadership affirmations that the will of the people *must* be respected there have been some remain protestations that it *must* be overturned. To do so would be national suicide by signing the death warrant of our own democracy. When an earthquake takes place its consequences have to be faced. It is no good pretending everything is unchanged or that the clock can be turned back. But where are Christians to begin in going forward?

No 'heaven-quake'

Christian reaction ought to begin with the sovereign, omnipotent God. What we have experienced is an *earthquake* not a 'heaven-quake'. In the heaven of heavens there is no such thing as quaking and the English language lacks a word for such an impossible thing. In the heaven of heavens there is no disturbance. God is exactly the same as he was on the 22nd of June and this would be true had Britain voted to remain on the 23rd. Psalm 29 is apposite: 'Give unto the *Lord*, O ye mighty, give unto the *Lord* glory and strength. Give unto the *Lord* the glory due unto his name; worship the *Lord* in the beauty of holiness... The voice of the *Lord* shaketh the wilderness; the *Lord* shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh... The *Lord* sitteth upon the flood; yea, the *Lord* sitteth King for ever. The *Lord* will give strength unto his people; the *Lord* will bless his people with peace' (verses 1-2, 8, 10-11). As in the Old Testament, so in the New, God is still on his throne. The Apostle John was banished to Patmos but he was to understand that God was still in control.

Christian stability

As God is unchangeable, so are his purposes for his people and his standards for our behaviour. We must not react as those around us as if the earthquake is just a temporal matter with no spiritual significance. For believers, the earthquake is a call to *Christian* response. What are the relevant pillars for this? I discovered no word 'heavenquake' but I did find a number of English words worth thinking about in connection with Christian stability in earthquakes in the affairs of men. They are as follows: (a) *Heaven-built*. Compare Matthew 16.18. (b) *Heaven-born*. Compare John 3.3. (c) *Heaven-directed*. Compare Isaiah 58.11a. (d) *Heavenly-minded*. Compare Philippians 4.8. (e) *Heaven-kissing* as tall Lake District mountains 'touch the sky'. I use *heaven-kissing* here for being in touch with heaven. The Book of Revelation encourages us to be daily in contact with heaven, not in an abstract way, but as the

newly-wedded bride kisses the bride-groom she loves for the Lamb is in Heaven, as the one who loved us and gave himself for us (See Revelation 5.6). These are the things that work for believers in all circumstances and states of mind.

A message from God?

The Book of Revelation encourages us to see that great changes on earth originate in heaven and convey something of God's view of things. We are to lay to heart great changes and meditate upon them. When John saw that 'the tenth part of the city fell' it was a signal of God's displeasure and of worse to come for sinful structures. In a recent comment in the ET I drew attention to three spiritual concerns in connection with the EU, formerly promoted as the European *Economic* Community. There has been a truth deficit contrary to Proverbs 23.23. There has been a financial stewardship deficit contrary to 1 Corinthians 4.2. There has been a justice deficit for some Christians contrary to Psalm 94.20. The 'tenth part' calls us to observe that God deals with imperial default by parts. There were 'ten' plagues in Egypt. When the fish died and the river stank, Pharaoh had opportunity to humble his heart and spare his people 9/10ths of their troubles but he hardened his heart. When God acts it becomes all men, even kings, to take note. The Israelites in Egypt were not to view the first tenth as the end, for it was but the beginning and much hardship still lay before them in the unfolding of God's victory. God's great triumphs come on by parts. In Revelation 11, the tenth lost is set out as a signal of a total fall of ungodliness. Whatever feelings Christians might have about 'in' or 'out' of the EU, no Christian should approve of its ungodly aspects. These will bring it down eventually except it reforms. Without referring to 'righteousness', EU leaders are already acknowledging the need to reform.

Challenges for the Church

John records that 'the remnant ... gave glory to the God of heaven'. This was a good effect but not a sufficient one for survival. It reminds us that heavenly things are the most important things but also that they must be *spiritually* embraced. If Christians voted merely on political and economic grounds it would be to our shame. The same can be said concerning our approach to the way ahead. Important as social, economic and political things are they are not the most important things. Good effects must be built upon. We are not to be content with beginnings. God has a purpose beyond economic welfare and human morality. God's purpose is to magnify Christ in this world of sin. Thus we read that when the seventh angel sounded 'there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever' (Revelation 11.15). Our generation has held to this but often with too much inner scepticism on account of a lifetime of setbacks to Christianity in the UK. We have a litany of disastrous policies: the abolition of the death penalty for murder, the death sentence for living babies by legal abortion, the departure from the Biblical (and EU Treaty) definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. We also have a litany of names of those who have suffered oppression of conscience: Lillian Ladele, Asher's Bakery, Michael Page, and various open air preachers. Providence has determined where we are but we must determine what we are to make of it and do about it. When so many have been engaged in voting it is evident that there is a deep concern throughout our nation about where our

future lies. Christians should have no doubt that our future lies in the triumph of truth. Christians would err in seeing the present state of affairs as only about economics, social policy and the balance of political power. That is not *all*. More fundamental is the spiritual opportunity to recall our nation to that from which it has fallen. The post referendum voting maps show the UK as a *Disunited Kingdom*. Is it not that Britons have sidelined the one thing that united us and made us great, namely, the claims of God? With God's help there are more for us than against us and believers must start with God and his purpose.

Building from an exit

God's providence has said, 'Out'. How do we build on that? Have we Biblical examples for progress? Many Jews after seventy years in Babylon were not for leaving the land of their captivity. They were for remaining. The future, however, lay with those committed to going out in accordance with what God had decreed and who could see beyond the horizontal to the vertical and who could grasp the spiritual good in political change when Cyrus issued his edict, 'Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the Lord God of Israel, (he is the God,) which is in Jerusalem' (Ezra 1.3). Consider the recorded godly responses. (a) Jeshua and Zerubbabel restored the worship of God. (Ezra 3.2). (b) Ezra, a ready scribe, diligently preached the truth. (Ezra 7.10). (c) Nehemiah exhorted his brethren to build the walls of Jerusalem. (Nehemiah 2.17). (d) Haggai reproved the Jews' sinful lethargy and encouraged them to see God's purpose in the shaking of nations. (Haggai 2.6-7). (e) Zechariah saw the horsemen of God's inspection and communicated the message from God's heart. (Zechariah 1.14b-16a) (f) Malachi directs to obedience to God and to God's sure blessing in Christ. 'Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it' (Malachi 3.10).

Uniting to stand

These are not things to divide 'Brexiters' and 'Remain' Christians or hoary heads and sons of youth. These are the things for *spiritual* union where God really can be for an England of true saints along with Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Once our family was on a train where all passengers were told to alight. Shortly, another train came in and everyone got on though we were not told where the train was going! We had to trust to go somewhere instead of staying marooned. Providence is much more reliable than rail companies, even if we have no road map for going forward. Revelation teaches us that God's future exists and without clarity concerning temporal destinations we can go forward in faith confident in Him. This is our challenge now. Abraham 'went out, not knowing whither he went' (Hebrews 11.8). The exact destination was not clear but he went in faith in God and prospered. May God grant us grace to seize the spiritual opportunities that Brexit presents.

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