

## Biblical Reflection on Brexit

This morning I woke up to the news that the UK has voted to leave the European Union. This is a far-reaching decision which will have consequences for many people, potentially either for good or bad. Not surprisingly, there have been many immediate reactions, not least the resignation of our Prime Minister and the dramatic fall in sterling and shares. There is also a lot of angry vitriol being poured out on social media by the "Remain" camp against the "Leave" voters.

No doubt, even within our church, there will be those who voted in both camps, each for their own reasons, yet now we are faced with a consequence of democracy: how to live together, now and in the future, with those of a different opinion. I confess that I am feeling somewhat numb and anxious at the uncertainties that now face us.

Those of you that know me will realise that I prefer not to take part in political debates, certainly not from a partisan viewpoint. Part of the reason for this is that I tend to be able to see strengths in both sides of an argument and am not keen on making black and white decisions! However, in a democracy, there are sometimes questions that need to be decided one way or the other – as in the case of the Referendum. Some would prefer our elected and informed politicians to make such decisions (so we can blame them afterwards?) but in a referendum it is the people (Greek: *demos*) who decide.

So momentous is the decision we, the people of the UK, have made that I felt obliged to write a short Biblical reflection on our situation, and call us all to prayer. So, what does The Bible have to say to us in our current situation?

First of all, democracy (as we know it) is not strictly a Biblical concept. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was led by single "charismatic" leaders under God's authority, such as Moses<sup>1</sup>, Joshua<sup>2</sup>, then the Judges such as Gideon<sup>3</sup>. Israel was rather a 'theocracy'. Finally, the people cried out for a king<sup>4</sup> (to be like the other nations) and God eventually gave in to their request and authorised Samuel to appoint them a king – King Saul.

Gideon had previously insisted that he would not accede to their demand to be their king because "*the LORD is your King*".<sup>5</sup> Samuel, too, warned the people of the consequences of human kingship<sup>6</sup> – warnings that came all too true in the disastrous reign of King Saul. Thankfully, God's choice of a replacement in King David – a man after God's own heart<sup>7</sup> – rescued the people and united the nation. David was not perfect, but his heart was right before God, even when he made seriously bad decisions.

The kings that followed David, however, were a mixed bag of good, bad and downright evil, usually unaccountable to the people. Even his own son Solomon left a legacy of a divided kingdom.<sup>8</sup> The prophets spoke out bravely against injustice and corruption. It was at the end of the reign of one of these kings, King Uzziah<sup>9</sup> that the prophet Isaiah saw his great vision of God in the Temple and declared, "*Woe to me, I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty!*"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The book of Exodus

<sup>2</sup> The book of Joshua

<sup>3</sup> Judges 6ff

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 8

<sup>5</sup> Judges 8:23

<sup>6</sup> 1 Samuel 8:10

<sup>7</sup> 1 Samuel 16

<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 11

<sup>9</sup> Isaiah 1:1

<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 6:5

Finally, the Kingdom of Israel came to an end, taken over by another great civilisation, Assyria.<sup>11</sup> But Assyria in turn was invaded and conquered by Babylon<sup>12</sup>. Daniel's interpretation of the King of Babylon's vision of a great statue<sup>13</sup> was that a whole series of empires and civilisations would come and go – after the Babylonians, the Persians<sup>14</sup>, then the Greeks, then the Romans. And as we all know, even the great Roman empire collapsed eventually. *"Finally,"* writes Daniel, *"in the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed ..."*<sup>15</sup>

Daniel, of course, like the other prophets was pointing to the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will *"reign on David's throne and over his kingdom for ever, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness, from that time on and for ever."*<sup>16</sup>

We are all naturally worried at what will happen now that the UK has decided to leave the EU. For many of our younger people, it is all they have known, and we now face great uncertainty. However, we would do well to heed the words of the prophet Isaiah, facing similar uncertainties:

*'Whether you turn to the right or the left, you will hear a voice behind you saying, "This is the way, walk in it."*'<sup>17</sup>

[My interpretation: for Right, read "Remain" or for Left read "Leave"]

Our valued, but imperfect, system of democracy has decided that we should leave. Many are upset and angry, whilst others are pleased. It is not a case now of "Who was right?". The history books will no doubt reflect on this question for many years hence. The history outlined in the Bible assures us that, whatever decisions humans make, God is ultimately on the throne of history. Indeed, it is HIS-story, in which we are all active participants.

The most important thing now is to work towards a unity that does not depend on political union, but on seeking God's kingdom to come here on earth as it is in heaven. We must love and respect one another – those who have declared their voting intentions and those who prefer to exercise their democratic right to a secret ballot – and now work together, especially to support those who will, at least in the short term, be hurt by this decision. Particularly, we must think of those many valued members of our own congregation who have joined us from many nations in Europe and across the world, who deeply enrich our fellowship.

And we must remember that, in God's time-frame, even momentous decisions such as this are relatively short-term. Of course, the money markets will react or over-react in the immediate aftermath, and political leaders' careers will change, but what matters now is how our world will change in the future and how we love our neighbours.

I suggest that we need to acknowledge, like Isaiah, our part in our nation's life, and God's sovereignty over it, to have a renewed vision of the Lord Jesus Christ on his throne and to earnestly seek him in prayer.

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**Friday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2016**

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<sup>11</sup> 2 Kings 17

<sup>12</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:15

<sup>13</sup> Daniel 2:24-45

<sup>14</sup> 2 Chronicles 36:22

<sup>15</sup> Daniel 2:44

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 9:7

<sup>17</sup> Isaiah 30:21