

What a Surprise!

Readers will be familiar with the great uncertainty involved in predicting the future, even in the short term. However, this does not deter people from trying to predict the outcome of national government elections; or more recently, the UK referendum on membership of the European Union.

Both the referendum and the last UK General Election gave outcomes that were unexpected. Companies that specialise in predicting outcomes using opinion polls and mathematical modelling got it quite wrong!

God Sets the Course of History

A long time ago, God spoke through the prophet Daniel to warn Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar that he was at risk of divine discipline, which would be designed to teach him that:

The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, gives it to whomever He will, and sets over it the lowest of men (Daniel 4:17).

Nebuchadnezzar experienced a period of madness imposed by God, and then finally acknowledged God's supremacy as well as His right to act as He sees fit in dealing with His creation, including the people in it.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation... He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. No one can restrain His hand or say to Him, "What have You done?" (v34-35).

Indeed, it is reasonable to expect both that the Creator will have a purpose and that He will accomplish it. The remarkable thing is that He does so while allowing men and women to exercise their free will.

This is illustrated in the history of the nation of Israel when God punished them through the invasion of the Assyrians. God described the invaders as "the rod of His anger" sent against "an ungodly nation" (Isaiah 10:5,6). This was not how the king of Assyria saw things. God said of him:

He does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and to cut off not a few nations (v7).

The king did not take God's view into account, but his free choice was going to achieve God's purpose. Having done so, God then removed him from power:

It shall come to pass, when the LORD has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, "I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks" (v12).

God is Still at Work

God is still at work among the nations today, working out His purpose. Consequently, those unexpected events and sudden changes in the course of history happen because God is at work, carrying out His purpose. He has revealed through Daniel that He intends to establish His kingdom upon earth in place of man's rulership.

In the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever (Daniel 2:44).

Readers may also remember Jesus' words in the prayer he taught his disciples: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).

While it is a long time since God spoke to Daniel and Jesus gave his prayer, this does not mean it will not happen. God works on a much bigger time-frame than our lifespan. Part of the delay is because God is merciful. As Peter says in his second letter:

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering to us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).



God's Word is Powerful

The power of God's word to accomplish His purpose is described by the prophet Isaiah:

For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me

and be void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it (Isaiah 55:10).

God's word is revealed in the Bible and merits our attention – earlier in the same chapter God says:

Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live (v3).

If we do not take advantage of God's generous offer of eternal life, then we will perish when we die. So it is not surprising that the chapter has this appeal:

Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon (v6, 7).

As Jesus said, we must take great notice of God's word: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (Matthew 13:9).

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