

God's Elections

This year, now almost past, has been momentous in terms of elections in key places around the world: Russia...Israel...the United States. Current world affairs seem overly affected by those single men chosen for offices of power.

Worried analysts evaluate Boris Yeltsin's survival. Will he hold up long enough to effect any democratic changes in Russia that may have begun?...Who will replace him?...Will Netanyahu hold up against world and internal pressure to keep Israel's God-given Land?...Others asked, would a U.S. change in the Presidency of the United States cause a rollback in any progress may have been made on behalf of the senior citizens or the poor?...But above and beyond any platform plan of any world leader is God's divine plan which has a specific agenda and a specific time table.

Elections of the Past

In the past God permitted certain powerful leaders to come to power to serve his own purposes. A pharaoh, "which knew not Joseph," arose in Egypt at the right time as Moses speaking for God said to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth" (Ex. 1:8; Rom. 9:17). Pharaoh served God's purposes. When it was time for the Babylonian world empire to end, God overruled that Cyrus came to power. "Thus saith the LORD to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have holden, to subdue nations before him...to open before him the two-leaved gates [of Babylon]...I will break in pieces the gates of brass and cut in sunder the bars of iron...For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name: I have surnamed thee, though thou has not known me" (Isaiah 45:1-4). Cyrus did not know God, but God picked him for power because He knew Cyrus would be generous enough to make a decree that the Jews could go back to their Land and rebuild their temple.

Israel itself only needed God's one vote to be considered the "elect" of God. "As touching the election, they [Israel] are beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Romans 11:28). What purpose does God's election of Israel serve? To the first father of Israel, Abraham, was given the promise, "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is upon the sea shore... In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:18). Passed down to Isaac, then Jacob and then his twelve sons the nation of Israel inherited this special choosing of God. "O children of Israel...you only have I known of all the families of the earth..." (Amos 3:1,2). This election of Israel meant not only special care by God, but also special responsibility and therefore special chastisements through history.

Blessing of the Non-elect

What is not generally comprehended is that the choosing of the seed of Abraham was not just for the blessing of the seed of Abraham. The selected "seed" was and is to "bless all the families of the earth." In other words, Israel was elected to be an instrument of blessing to the non-elect!

To say Israel had lost their chance to be blessers by not accepting Jesus Christ is to ignore the Apostle Paul's powerful discourse in Romans 11. Yes, "the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Romans 11:7). Only a few accepted the call to become Christians, but Paul concludes that this blindness would only last until the Church was complete, "Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Romans 11:25). After that time, "Thus all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, the Deliverer will come from Zion, and he will remove ungodliness from Jacob.

And this is my covenant with them when I take away their sins." (Romans 11:25,26). Some Christians are very enthusiastic about the present regathering of Israel, but their expectation is that only a small remnant will be saved and up to 10 million damned. If that were true, it would be a gross exaggeration for the Apostle Paul to say, "All Israel will be saved." Then too, to say this has already happened that "all the families of the earth" have been blessed would also be a gross exaggeration on God's part.

The Elect: Two Parts

What is also not appreciated generally is just who is this chosen, elected "seed"? The promise is that the seed would be as the "stars of heaven" as well as the "sands of the seashore." The elect seed would be both spiritual and earthly. Most Christians usually only appreciate half the promise, that is, regarding the heavenly seed. But the spiritual "seed" will work together with the earthly "seed" to bless all the families of the earth. The Christian elect will work through the earthly elect to bless all the nations (Isaiah 2:1-4) God's promises concerning those whom He elects are not an exaggeration!

What can a Christian do now to "bless all the families of the earth"? Or at least some of the families of the earth? Wouldn't the best most efficient plan be to exert good Christian influence on the governments of this world, its laws, its policies? Christian involvement in politics is nothing new. Back in the fourth century, the Emperor Constantine legalized Christianity thinking it useful for adding some stability to his wobbling Roman empire. On the other side, grasping Christian leaders who were eager for more power consorted with his civil government. Why wait for Christ's kingdom when we can help it happen?

When Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants fight," he could have just as easily said, My kingdom is not of this world, else would my servants vote...or run for office... On the contrary, he taught his disciples to pray for the coming

kingdom, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." But Christians became weary of waiting, weary of being persecuted. Ambitious leaders in the church rose to power. They violated the laws of ordination laid down by the Apostles in the early church. Members of each congregation were responsible for placing their leaders into office. That responsibility was relaxed and "wolves" were quick to swoop in and take advantage of the flock. Paul had warned, "After my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29).

Elections in the Church

Election of church leaders was the custom in the early church. "And when they had ordained them elders in every church and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord" (Acts 14:23). The word for "ordain" comes from a root word meaning "to stretch," and so means "to be a hand-reacher or voter (by raising the hand)" (strong's exhaustive concordance of the bible, #5500). Scripturally, church government means, therefore, congregations electing pastors! It does not mean appointments of church leaders by some self-appointed board or body of people. If the early church practice would not have been changed throughout the Christian age, what a different history we would have of the Christian church! Instead of getting involved in secular affairs of state, Christians should have taken the responsibility of electing their own leaders.

The New Testament gives specific guidelines for election of the office of "overseers" in the church (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-11). The Apostle did not leave these regulations as a quaint protocol just for his time for electing servants in the church. The qualifications for office are clear: A candidate must be apt to teach, not a novice; possessing a blameless reputation, just, holy, able "both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (NAS), etc. But gradually the bodies of believers from city to city surrendered their responsibilities to hungry "wolves." Soon the prominent bishops in each church yielded their allegiance to the most powerful bishop in Rome. While later some Christians rejected the Bishop of Rome, they still usually fell short of claiming their scriptural responsibility for electing their own elders or pastors.

So what is a Christian to do? Yes, Christians are to vote. They are to vote in their congregations as the Apostle Paul laid down the inspired regulations. No, they are not to participate in the governments of this world by voting or getting involved in politics. But they are to be law-abiding and "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's." And yes, they are to have faith that those whom God brings to power (Romans 13:1-3) are permitted for a time to serve God's own purposes in the outworking of His divine plan.