

# God's Temporal Judgment

## Introduction

A huge furore has erupted over the published views of a Baptist Christian in his seventies, named David Silvester, which were printed as a letter in his local newspaper. This is chiefly because he is a former Conservative, now UKIP, town councillor for Henley-on-Thames. His view was that the recent severe storms that have thrashed the country were a direct punishment from God because the nation has legalised Gay marriage.

Curiously, despite distancing themselves from his actual views, senior UKIP figures originally accepted that he had the right to speak his mind, though stating that this was not UKIP policy. However, this all changed when numerous Twitter accounts and YouTube websites began lampooning UKIP and Silvester, leading to a major discussion on BBC Radio 2's Jeremy Vine Programme on 20 January 2014. UKIP then disciplined Silvester and demanded he stop giving interviews.

What is saddening to me is that numerous Christian individuals and organisations were contacted for their opinions. At best these were vague and muddy, even when they broadly supported Silvester; but far worse was the fact that many evangelical organisations and denominations castigated him for being out of date and a throwback to earlier, immature religious views.

If one reads the transcripts of Silvester's comments you find that he is generally advocating a traditional, evangelical point of view, that the progressive departures of a formerly 'Christian' nation from righteousness will reap divine judgment and that the recent Gay legislation and the abortion holocaust were significant parts of this degeneration into social depravity. He rejected claims of homophobia, stating that he loved Gay people as individuals and sought their spiritual healing; however, there were repercussions for a nation persisting in what is wrong.

What then is the truth about all this?

## Limitations

There are two limitations to be taken into account in this matter.

The first is: is there Scriptural proof that God sometimes intervenes in temporal judgment on a nation for its sins?

Secondly: can we categorically state that the recent storms were directly caused by Gay marriage being legalised in the UK? Does God state that he will always intervene judicially when a nation adopts and legislates in support of homosexuality?

## Temporal judgment in general

### *Definition*

All genuine Christians accept that there is a final judgment of all men for their sins on the Day of Judgment at the end. This is unquestionably Biblical doctrine. Most historic Christians would also accept that there are temporal judgments of God on individuals and nations according to his good pleasure.

'Temporal' means: relating to worldly rather than spiritual matters. 'Temporal judgment' refers to the application of condemnation and punishment by God in time, in this world, before the Day of Judgment at the end.

An example of the temporal judgment of church members is the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11).

An example of a nation suffering temporal judgment is Moab:

I will execute judgments upon Moab, and they shall know that I am the LORD. Ezek 25:11

An example of temporal judgment upon an individual sinner is Elymas:

But Elymas the sorcerer (for so his name is translated) withstood them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. Then Saul, who also *is called* Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked intently at him and said, 'O full of all deceit and all fraud, *you* son of the devil, *you* enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, indeed, the hand of the Lord *is* upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a time.' And immediately a dark mist fell on him, and he went around seeking someone to lead him by the hand. Acts: 13:8-11

Regarding the affirmation that God does intervene in temporal judgment on nations for iniquity, there are two questions:

Does God, in the Bible, affirm that he will judge a theocratic nation, i.e. Israel, for unrighteous laws and behaviour?

Does God intervene in temporal judgment to non-Christian nations?

It is my argument that the answer to both questions is yes. Indeed, I would say that this is the generally accepted position of historic Christian comment. We have already seen an example in the case of Moab.

A further comment is necessary. There is no longer any Christian nation. The theocracy died with the rejection of the nation of Israel by God (Matt 21:43) and there has never been another nation where God was its king. Identifying Britain or America as 'Christian' is unhelpful. Though both nations were developed under Christian principles, especially in law, justice and the parliamentary system, they were never fully Christian and never could be.

### **The theocratic nation is temporally judged for its unrighteousness**

The Bible makes eminently clear the fact that Israel was temporally judged for unrighteousness, particularly of its national and religious leaders. The basis of this was the original blessing and cursing promised to the nation by Moses in the wilderness just before the entrance into the promised land, with Moses adding that he doubted their future obedience (Deut 28:15-68, 29:21).

Because Israel was chosen by God, experienced many miracles, had been given the law of God objectively and received constant correction by divinely sent prophets, they were treated with greater harshness than other nations who were ignorant. Because Israel was always 'a stiff-necked people' their temporal punishments were severe. Most serious was the continual apostasy and idolatry of the people set apart by God to serve him alone.

However, one of the repeated divine criticisms of Israel's social policy was its oppression of the poor and neglect of the vulnerable, strangers, widows and needy. Repeatedly, God threatened judgment for this social oppression through prophet after prophet. For multiple examples see my paper, '*Condemning wickedness*'.

Thus Israel suffered many temporal judgments: famine, war, pestilence, and most severely, exile into Assyria and Babylonia. Despite these national temporal judgments, individuals

who were the prime causes of national failure (e.g. king Ahab) will still be judged and punished on the Day of Judgment.

### **The non-Christian nation is temporally judged for its unrighteousness**

While secular nations did not have the advantages of Israel in terms of revelation, they were judged according to their natural responsibility to observe the moral law in their conscience and submit to the Creator whose glory they saw in nature.

Without God's written law they were not so guilty as Israel in idolatry; that was just their natural sinful state; however, the nations were severely judged for their social oppression of the poor and needy, their cruel and barbarous ways, their oppression of lesser nations, their pride and their general injustice.

Scripture is full of references regarding the oppression of the poor, but I will give just a sample from one book that lays down eternal principles.

**Do not rob the poor because he *is* poor, nor oppress the afflicted.** Prov 22:22

*Like a roaring lion and a charging bear is a wicked ruler over poor people.* Prov 28:15

**He who gives to the poor will not lack, but he who hides his eyes will have many curses.** Prov 29:27

Just the last quote is sufficient: the rulers that ignore the plight of the poor (let alone worsening their condition) will have many curses. For numerous quotes regarding divine threats regarding the oppression of the poor see my recent paper, '*Condemning wickedness*'.

### **Does God bring judgment on a nation for adopting homosexuality?**

God's word makes clear that homosexuality is a sin; thus to legislate for it or to support it socially is a greater sin. There is also at least one case where God condemned a nation and covered it in wrath for its many sins, of which homosexuality was the most prominent. This of course refers to the sister city-states of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 13:13, 18:20, 19:5, 24).

However, there are not direct cause and effect statements of judgment on a nation for homosexuality as obvious in Scripture as there are regarding the neglect of the poor and needy. Repeatedly nations are warned about this great sin of social oppression. Therefore, it is more difficult to say that God brings temporal judgment on nations for homosexuality. Indeed, fornication is just as bad and one could argue that adultery has worse social effects. Yet no one is claiming that storms were caused by the many adulteries or the constant fornication in the modern world.

### **Were the recent storms an example of temporal judgment; if so, what for?**

I have recently stated that the storms are a temporal judgment by God. However, it is my view that the immediate cause of this condemnation is twofold: first the general degeneration of society to be more and more godless, where legislation legalises sin. Gay marriage would be a part of this general breakdown. But the chief cause is the recent severe oppression of the poor, and vulnerable in society caused by the draconian changes to the welfare system; forcing more and more people into poverty, causing many children to be malnourished, inciting people to suicide, and so on. This is a far greater offence to God. See my papers, '*The wickedness of the current rise in poverty*' and '*What God thinks of measures that affect the poor*'. That Christians should condemn this vocally is argued in my paper, '*Condemning Wickedness*'.

### **Conclusion**

What are we to say about David Silvester's comments?

Firstly, we should congratulate his courage in stating his beliefs that are correct in general. This was not easy for a public figure and may cost him his councillor's job. This man stood up to be counted as a Christian in public office. He also correctly drew attention to the degeneration of society in general and its departure from Biblical principles.

However, to state categorically that the recent storms were directly caused by the legalisation of Gay marriage is a step too far. It is noteworthy that he said that he came to this conclusion as a result of personal prayer, not Biblical statements. In other words it is a subjective view. It is my view (and that is all I claim for it) that the storms were the result of the down-treading of the poor and needy by government. There are many objective Biblical statements that support this view. However, God is certainly angered by the legalisation of homosexuality and its promotion in society.

### **Aside: the suffering of the 'innocent'**

Why does God afflict the 'innocent' in temporal judgment? As Jeremy Vine summarised, why would God visit the sin of Gay people in Soho on townships in Norfolk that flooded?

This is a complex issue that really requires a separate paper; however, I will offer some points to consider.

Jesus himself refers to this in Luke 13:4-5: 'those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish'.

Everyone is filled with sin and deserves condemnation if they do not repent. The early death of people does not mean that they are innocent. Whether someone dies early or at a great age makes no difference; both are sinners; both will be condemned. Those on whom the tower fell were not innocent; their end just came more quickly. No one is innocent; all men are sinners; all men deserve to die.

Then we have to take the matter of corporate responsibility, much neglected these days. Everyone in the nation is responsible, to some degree, for the sins of that nation (in the same way that everyone in a church congregation is responsible for the heresy spouted by the pastor). Unless one distances themselves vocally from the sins of politicians, they are guilty of supporting them in those sins; even worse if one voted for them.

While it is difficult to consider the temporal judgment that affects others than those who are most guilty, from an earthly perspective, the fact is that Scripture records many instances of this and we simply have to accept that God knows what he is doing. Furthermore, no one escapes judgment. The chief perpetrators (e.g. politicians) will face God in eternal judgment. Indeed, the eternal judgment of those who suffered in temporal judgment will be less than those who escaped the temporal judgment because they have already suffered to some degree. All will be made fair and just; people are not punished twice for the same sin

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