

Voting and God's Leaders

Commentary for October 14, 2008 — Man Proposes, God Disposes

The subtitle of this Commentary accurately describes what takes place on earth regarding the selection and placement of leaders of nations at the highest levels. God actually chooses national leaders Himself, and He removes them as He desires. There is no doubt about this fact (Daniel 5:21).¹ Nevertheless citizens have a part to play in fulfilling civic responsibilities. Contrary to what some denominations believe, voting is not bad or evil. We are to **“render unto Caesar”** (Matthew 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25) not just with tribute and taxes, but also with our service, such as voting.

In ancient times local government was “representative” in its own unique way. In societies where most everyone was married, a man voted within his clan or tribe or village and he represented his extended family of wife (or wives), children, servants and perhaps parents. Tribal elders represented the families and clans, and often those elders were elected. They in turn had councils where public business was decided by vote.² Later, under the unified and divided monarchy, the towns and cities had councils with local jurisdiction over everyday affairs. In New Testament times synagogue rulers were elected by the congregation.³

Historically there are two modes of voting. One is by visible public voting where everyone sees how you vote. Public acclamation is a form of voting. This is done in small groups such as boards and groups contained in one room.⁴ Everyone knows how everyone votes. Legislatures today vote in this manner.

The other mode of voting is by secret ballot. This is usually done when the number of voters is large.⁵ Only the total count of the ballots is known. No one knows how any one individual voted. This is done to prevent reprisals against those who vote the “wrong” way.

Both are found in Scripture. Several instances of “voting” are found in reference to the *ekklesia*. The apostles cast lots (voted) to have Matthias replace Judas (Acts 1:19–26). In Acts 14:23 the word “ordained” and in 2 Corinthians 8:19 the word “chosen” both are from a Greek word which is a common word for “vote” for qualified leaders (see also 1 Timothy 3:1–13 and Titus 1:5). These were public votes within a small group, the *ekklesia*, where everyone raised their hand to select between options. So too, seven men to serve the new *ekklesia* in Acts 6:1–6 were elected by the congregation. In Acts 15:22, 25 men were chosen or elected to accompany Paul and Barnabas to vouch for them.

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1. See my October 7, 2004 Commentary [“The Selection of the U.S. President”](#) and the October 15, 2003 Commentary [“Changes of World Leaders,”](#) especially the section: “God Decides Who Rules.”
 2. Moses was a notable exception; God chose him to lead the 12 tribes of Israel. Several times the leaders and people tried to “unelect” Moses from his position, which ended badly for the rebels. See Numbers chapter 16.
 3. See Dr. Martin’s presentation [“Synagogues and Ekklesias”](#) on the open nature of the ancient synagogue.
 4. The Sanhedrin voted to condemn Christ in such a body by acclamation (Matthew 26:66; Mark 14:63). The Jewish people chose or “voted” by acclamation to release Barrabas rather than Jesus (Matthew 27:15–26).
 5. In England in the 1700s data about how each voter (all men) voted on issues, which candidates they voted for, and party affiliation, were all written in public ledgers for anyone to view. This information was sometimes used to punish areas whose people voted the “wrong” way. Now these ledgers are extremely valuable historical records about public sentiment in England at that time.

Private voting among a larger group was done by dropping a pebble, black or white (black being “no” and white being “yes”) into a container. The result of the secret ballot was counted and announced. Life and death decisions were often done by secret ballot. This is what Paul meant when, as Saul before his conversion, he cast his vote against Christians, members of God’s *ekklesia*, to punish and even put some of them to death:

“And I did so in Jerusalem; I not only shut up many of the saints in prison, by authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote [psephos, a pebble] against them.”

• *Acts 26:10*

Nationally, God chose Israel and separated them out as a people from the nations, yet God gave Israel the opportunity to choose or vote whether to accept God’s covenant or not. It was a vote by all the people of Israel (Exodus 24:7). God chose Israel’s first king, Saul, and the people acknowledged and acclaimed it (1 Samuel 9:16–17, 10:24).

King David was anointed three times: (1) He was first anointed as king of Israel by God through Samuel the seer (1 Samuel 16:1–13). (2) Later David was anointed king of Judah by the men of Judah (2 Samuel 2:1–7). (3) Still later David was anointed king of all Israel by all the tribes of Israel (2 Samuel 5:1–5).⁶ Each rebellion against David, such as by David’s son Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1–12) and Sheba the Benjamite (2 Samuel chapter 20), were actually “votes with weapons” by segments of the population against David continuing to be their king.

While God chooses our top national leaders, today we are able to participate in His process by voting and acting. God has seen fit to have us live within the Babylonian system until Christ’s return. Voting is part of that system as it presently exists. Remember that Jewish exiles to Babylon such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Mordecai, Queen Esther, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, and Ezra all participated directly at very high levels within the Babylonian government and later the Persian government.⁷

“Then Daniel requested of the king, and he set Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel sat in the gate of the king.”

• *Daniel 2:49*

We are free to participate in our governments. It is honorable to do so at whatever level of authority. (After all, we are in training to judge angels, 1 Corinthians 6:3.) Part of that participation is to vote as citizens of a community or country. Will you agree with God’s choice? Do we, like Israel, receive the government we deserve? Why does God choose one man over another, realizing that often God often raises to power **“the basest of men”** (Daniel 4:17)?⁸ Study the Scriptures. There seems to be an abundance of “base” people in power today.

We are to pray for our leaders, asking God to have them rule with justice (1 Timothy 2:1–3). God’s choice prevails for however long He chooses to have that person lead.

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6. The anointings by Judah and Israel followed the anointing by God. They were mere acknowledgements of what God had already determined for them. Whether they realized that or not is not known. Perhaps they thought they made the choice. Whatever the case, the anointings were public acknowledgements and acceptance by the tribes of Israel of God’s decision. In terms of the tribal structure they voted to approve God’s decision.
 7. Those are the individuals who participated in these governments that we know about from Scripture. There were likely many others who participated in high levels of the Babylonian and Persian governmental structure. The admonition to come out of Babylon in Revelation 18:4 has to do with a particular circumstance and time just before Babylon’s destruction just prior to Christ’s return.
 8. The Hebrew word “basest” can mean lowest in station, lowest in power, but it can also mean least in moral compass, like the “vile person” of Daniel 11:21.