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THE BRISBANE FLOODS

by D.B. Knox

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The Protestant Faith

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The floods in Brisbane have been a tremendous tragedy for many families and businesses in that great city. A third of the city was flooded and the disaster followed on the heels of another awe inspiring catastrophe in the flooding of the north west of New South Wales. It was reported that a third of the state was under water - which is an extraordinary figure. At the same time there were extensive floods in the gulf country of Queensland. You will remember that a year or two ago the same area of New South Wales and Queensland was in the grip of one of the most devastating droughts.

The newspapers have described these events as catastrophies of nature, and so they are, but we ought not to rest in our minds simply at this point, because every event of nature is directly under the control of God. Jesus said that it is God who sends the rain, and that it is God who makes the sun to rise (Matt. 5:45). Rain and sunshine are under God's absolute control, and we give Him thanks for the fruitful seasons which they normally ensure. But floods and drought are equally under God's control and we ought to pause to think why He has permitted them.

The Scriptures are quite clear that these natural aberrations of the normally beneficent action of nature are allowed for the purpose of bringing us to a better mind, with regard to God, the source of all our life and blessings. Palestine, of course, being a very hilly country did not suffer from floods, but it suffered from prolonged periods of rain and the Old Testament describes the mildew and the rotting of the grain **under the sods** as God's judgement on Israel for their God-forgetfulness (Joel 1:17). So too drought is described in the Old Testament as God's judgement, and the prophets call on the people to turn back to God lest God's final judgement overwhelms them.

Not that we ought to think of those who suffer from these floods as being particularly wicked. Jesus made it clear that this is not so. On one occasion His disciples drew His attention to the fate of some Galileans whom Pilate had put to death and Jesus replied "Do not think that these people were more wicked than the rest, but these things have happened in order to remind you that you all deserve the same fate and

will receive it unless you change your mind and your attitude." He went on to use another illustration from current events. The tower of Siloam in Jerusalem had collapsed unexpectedly and killed some of the passers-by. Jesus said "Do not think that these people were more wicked than other people who lived in Jerusalem but unless you repent you shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:4-5).

God uses natural disasters on a national scale like floods or drought or disasters on a personal scale like sickness or accident for the purpose of bringing us to a better mind about life. If we use these things in this way, they will prove to be blessings in disguise because if the final judgement of death overtakes us before we have come to this better mind, before we have repented, then our doom is sealed.

The first thing that we need to change our mind about is the power and sovereignty of God. Instead of attributing the world and our own life to natural causes we should recognise God's creative power and give Him thanks. And the second thing to change our minds about is our estimate of our own characters. We are normally pretty confident about our own characters but the Bible is clear that because of our refusal to acknowledge God as He truly is our lives are all awry. We are out of relationship with God and out of relationship with the rest of God's creation, not only with our environment but also with our fellow men and women. We are under God's condemnation and if we do not change our attitude, change our ways of life, with regard to Him we will certainly be under His final condemnation in hell.

These judgements which occur from time to time in life such as the floods in Queensland or the drought or personal problems are intended to be used to reorient ourselves towards the truth. We should acknowledge and hallow God. We should cleanse our common life from greed and filth. Unless we repent, our Lord reminds us, our whole nation will perish.

And what is true of our nation is true of us Christians in the church. St. Paul told the Corinthians (1Cor: 11:30,31) that

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because of their behaviour as Christians God was at that very moment judging them, some with sickness, some with death, and this judgement was for the purpose of bringing them to a better mind in their Christian life. And St. Paul, paraphrasing the Lord's advice, told the Corinthians "if you judge yourself and correct yourself you will not need or receive the judgement of God."

So the floods of New South Wales and Queensland should be an occasion for us Christians to examine our attitudes and see whether they conform to what we know to be the truth. For example, have we unconsciously accepted the world's view about life so that we fail to ascribe to God the sovereignty of the details of life, do we think things happen by chance or by luck apart from God's knowledge and Will?

This false attitude has taken a firm grip amongst Christians in the sphere of conversion. The worldly man thinks that he is in control of his own life and many Christians think that the human will is in control of conversion despite the clear statements of scripture that God is in control of all things and in particular in control of the choice of those whom He calls to be His adopted sons and daughters. Some modern evangelistic methods are based on this worldly attitude of thinking that the human will is autonomous in the sphere of conversion. Christians need to repent at this point and give God the glory, for it is God who opens the heart to respond to the Gospel, and our methods of evangelism should always be within the sphere of this truth.

Another area where Christians need to repent is in the value they give to this present life. Although the gospel consists of the proclamation of the Kingdom of God, that is to say, His future power and glory in Christ, modern Christians (both individuals and the organised church) are almost all represented by the seed in the parable that fell among the thorns. They believe the Word of the Kingdom, but the things of this life (even spiritual things such as life with a captial "L") and the desire for riches and the comfort and power that the riches bring, and the desire for having more

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than they have got, to paraphrase Mark Chapter 4, is choking the Word. In this situation we must expect God in His love to judge us and judge us severely, in order that we might come to a better mind, rather than perish everlastingly and therefore the national judgements of the floods ought to energise Christians to judge themselves with rigour, to take themselves to prayer that God will give them a better mind. For unless we repent we will find ourselves classified with those whom Jesus said will all likewise perish.

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