



# General Election 2024

## Prayer Briefing



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7<sup>th</sup> June 2024

### INTRODUCTION

Rishi Sunak's surprise announcement on 22<sup>nd</sup> May began a six-week campaign leading up to a general election on 4<sup>th</sup> July. Intercessors For Britain is not here to tell people how to campaign or vote. However, IFB's stated aim is "to inspire and inform prayer for our nation", and we are therefore providing information to guide and provoke God's people into praying – praying in such a way that God might give the most merciful outcome, not just in Parliament but in the nation and in our own hearts. While we will provide some select information about the political situation, our key desire is to bring a wider spiritual perspective as the nation prepares to vote, and to ask how the church could best be praying in the light of that.

### THE POLITICAL SITUATION

#### Positive initiatives lost

Before considering what may be to come, we should recognise what may be lost as a result of the general election coming at this time. The current government has been working on a number of key initiatives which may now fall by the wayside or be significantly changed by the next government:

- New and improved guidance on sex education, introducing age limits and restricting teaching on gender identity (draft version published and undergoing a consultation).
- Guidance on how buffer zones are implemented around abortion clinics, potentially allowing prayer and offers of conversations (draft version published and consulted upon; awaiting finalisation).
- Guidance on how schools deal with gender-confused children, advising single-sex facilities are maintained and parents kept informed about their children, but not banning social transitioning (draft version published and consulted upon; awaiting finalisation).
- A plan to require new and refurbished non-residential buildings to have single-sex toilets (announced; expected to be implemented later this year).
- A call for feedback about public institutions and related organisations that are misinterpreting the law on single-sex facilities (survey currently open).
- A conversion therapy ban – a potential concern for spiritual freedoms, but expected to be less harsh than legislation other parties would potentially seek to introduce (not yet published).

#### A political earthquake

While polls should be treated with a degree of caution, for some time now every poll has put Labour ahead of the Conservatives by a wide margin (c.44% versus c.23% of vote share in recent months). In our electoral system this wouldn't necessarily guarantee a large majority, but the most recent and reliable polls have shown a further widening of the gap; Labour could now win an even bigger landslide than in 1997, and Reform UK's surge in support is expected to decrease Conservative vote share still further.

Additionally, there are an unusually high number of MPs standing down at this election, including many older and experienced politicians. Adding this to the voting predictions above, it's quite possible that a political earthquake will take place in July, with a large amount of new lawmakers and a powerful government with little effective opposition.

## Leaders and policies

Our current prime minister Rishi Sunak is an ex-banker who became the UK's first Hindu leader in October 2022. He has lit Diwali candles in Downing Street, placed gods in his offices, taken part in Hindu rites, described his faith as his identity and pride, and said his beliefs guide him "in every aspect" of life.

Sunak publicly supported Brexit in the 2016 EU referendum, but has repeatedly abstained or been absent from various votes in the Commons on abortion and other moral issues since he became an MP. However, as noted above, his government has pursued generally cautious policies regarding transgender issues, sex education and personal freedoms, as well as finishing the passage of the Online Safety Bill to restrict children's encounters with pornography and other harmful material.

Sunak has tried to tackle record levels of illegal immigration through his Rwanda policy, although this has been beset with difficulties and is expected to face further legal challenges. Since 7th October he has stood up for Israel and the Jewish people (at least most of the time) by visiting Israel, supporting Israel's right to defend itself, and funding £3 million of extra security for Jewish establishments in the UK.

Sir Keir Starmer spent his early career as a left-wing lawyer, before becoming an establishment figure as the Director of Public Prosecutions. He is an atheist who was brought up "loosely Church of England"; his wife is Jewish, and he has previously said their children were brought up to recognise their ancestors' faith.

Since replacing Jeremy Corbyn as Labour leader in 2020, Starmer has tried to root out antisemitism within the party. However, at the time of writing, Labour is set to promise recognition of a Palestinian state. Starmer has said he will make time for a bill legalising assisted suicide, and his shadow equalities secretary promised a "full, no loopholes ban" on conversion therapy if Labour comes to power, which would threaten religious freedoms. He has previously expressed pro-trans sentiments, proclaiming that "trans women [i.e. men claiming to be women] are women", although he has spoken more cautiously since the publication of the Cass Report. He no longer supports self-declaration of gender, but he wants to simplify gender changes.

Starmer's past voting record shows that he supported several moves to liberalise abortion laws (including abortion clinic buffer zones, and imposing abortion on Northern Ireland), and also voted to impose same-sex marriage on Northern Ireland. He campaigned against Brexit and initially wanted a second referendum; he has since ruled that out and apparently accepted Brexit, but he wants to sign a new deal to improve trade with the EU (which could involve following some EU rules under the European Court of Justice's oversight).

## A full in-tray

Whichever person wins power, he will face an ever-increasing mountain of problems from both within and outside the nation. The UK continues to feel the effects of the pandemic, which drove national debt to unsustainable new heights and deepened the mental health crisis. Prisons and public services are creaking, with long NHS waiting lists and shortages of teachers, carers, police and other key workers. The population is ageing due to falling birth rates, yet nearly 11 million people of working age are not working. Over 100,000 children are in care, and the number keeps growing while the number of foster families is declining. The small boats crisis seems unsolvable, with many migrants burdening the state and failing to integrate with society. Russia, China and Iran are undermining our democracy by various means, and all-out war is now considered a serious possibility, but our armed forces are depleted. The Israel-Hamas war is a further test of leadership, with God's covenant people desperate for support as antisemitism and radical Islamism run rampant, with high-profile demands from Muslim communities for pro-Palestinian policies. Yet all of this should prompt us to ask a wider question, which goes beyond any election: what is going on?

## THE SPIRITUAL SITUATION

### God's diagnosis

When the nation of Judah was in a similar state of crisis and decline, and was in a similar state of denial or confusion as to the cause, God stepped in and told them very clearly what was going on:

*<sup>12</sup> "For thus says the LORD, 'Your wound is incurable and your injury is serious. <sup>13</sup> 'There is no one to plead your cause; no healing for your sore, no recovery for you. <sup>14</sup> 'All your lovers have forgotten you, they do not seek you; for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the punishment of a cruel one, because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous. <sup>15</sup> 'Why do you cry out over your injury? Your pain is incurable. Because your iniquity is great and your sins are numerous, I have done these things to you. (Jeremiah 30:12-15, NASB)*

Years earlier, God gave a similar message to both Judah and the northern kingdom of Ephraim (Israel):

*<sup>11</sup> Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to follow man's command. <sup>12</sup> Therefore I am like a moth to Ephraim and like rotteness to the house of Judah. <sup>13</sup> When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb. But he is unable to heal you, or to cure you of your wound. <sup>14</sup> For I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear to pieces and go away, I will carry away, and there will be none to deliver. <sup>15</sup> I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me. (Hosea 5:11-15, NASB)*

### A serious sickness and incurable wound

In the passages above, God looks down from His perfect vantage point and uses the metaphors of sickness and injury to describe the state of a nation. Some individuals in the secular press have recognised this about our own nation, describing the UK as "in a mess", "Broken Britain" or similar phrases. Sir Mark Rowley (head of the Met Police) recently said that up to 4 million people across England and Wales are perpetrators of violence against women and children, and was honest enough to admit it was an overwhelming situation, saying: "The scale of this is way beyond policing and the justice system and we need a frank conversation about it..."

However, even when people do see the state our nation is in, they all too often say (as Sir Mark went on to say) that there are solutions which can fix the problems. Given enough money or enough strategies, it's thought that everything can be made better again and the nation will be put to rights. Yet God would say that our wounds and sickness are incurable, at least by human means, and no amount of turning to money or strategies (like Ephraim turned to Assyria) will bring healing and restoration.

### "I have done these things to you"

The truth is that we are in the state we are in because we have turned from both God and His ways. After He miraculously delivered us in World War Two in response to national days of prayer, we thanked Him by abandoning Christianity, pursuing sinful lives, and enacting wicked laws in defiance of His commandments. Our nation has been stained by ever-increasing levels of abortion, greed, divorce, sexual impurity, transgenderism, abuse and other things that contravene God's standards and offend His holiness. And as a result, as per the unchangeable Scriptural principle, we are reaping what we have sown.

God told Judah and Israel that their incurable wounds were because of their sins, and that He was the one who had wounded them like an enemy. As we pray for God to give a merciful outcome in the upcoming

election, we must remember that our dire situation is a judgement from God because of our sins, and that He is unlikely to show great mercies while those sins remain undealt with. Does the church recognise what God has been doing and take it seriously, or does it risk fighting against God by trying to push open a door of blessing that He has shut until we repent?

When Israel was initially defeated by Ai, Joshua saw enough of the situation's severity to fall on his face before God and cry for mercy. But God said to him:

*“Rise up! Why is it that you have fallen on your face? <sup>11</sup> Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed My covenant which I commanded them. ... <sup>12</sup> Therefore the sons of Israel cannot stand before their enemies; they turn their backs before their enemies, for they have become accursed. I will not be with you anymore unless you destroy the things under the ban from your midst.” (Joshua 7:10-12, NASB)*

### Looking in the wrong places

In the passage quoted above from Hosea, Israel responded to its sickness by turning to the nation of Assyria for help, only to be sorely disappointed. In Isaiah 3, God warned Judah that He was going to take away both prosperity and wisdom from the nation, and that the suffering people would reach for immature leaders who would be incapable of curing their sickness:

*<sup>1</sup> “For behold, the Lord, the LORD of hosts, takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah the stock and the store, the whole supply of bread and the whole supply of water; <sup>2</sup> the mighty man and the man of war, the judge and the prophet, and the diviner and the elder; <sup>3</sup> The captain of fifty and the honorable man, the counselor and the skillful artisan, and the expert enchanter. <sup>4</sup> “I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them. <sup>5</sup> The people will be oppressed, every one by another and every one by his neighbor; the child will be insolent toward the elder, and the base toward the honorable.” <sup>6</sup> When a man takes hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, “You have clothing; you be our ruler, and let these ruins be under your power,” <sup>7</sup> in that day he will protest, saying, “I cannot cure your ills, for in my house is neither food nor clothing; do not make me a ruler of the people.” (Isaiah 3:1-7, NKJV)*

Those latter verses could almost describe our paucity of choice at the ballot box this July. At a time of huge geopolitical challenges abroad and worsening societal conditions at home, the nation is looking for people with bold ideas and effective solutions, but finds no-one offering anything remotely close to them. And even with the best human strategies in the world, neither Sunak nor Starmer will be able to restore what our sin has damaged – in fact, they are likely to make things worse. How the church and the nation needs to stop looking to leaders and parties for salvation!

### Hope for healing

We praise God that His judgements are often redemptive, and there is hope for healing if we learn our lesson. Both Hosea and Jeremiah go on to offer this:

*<sup>1</sup> “Come, let us return to the LORD. For He has torn us, but He will heal us; He has wounded us, but He will bandage us. (Hosea 6:1, NASB)*

*<sup>17</sup> “For I will restore you to health and I will heal you of your wounds,” declares the LORD... (Jeremiah 30:17, NASB)*

There was going to be no easy route to gain the healing – if Judah and Israel didn't urgently repent, they were going to experience invasion and exile to wake them up, humble them and convict them of their sin – but on

the other side of that, a remnant would emerge who would turn back to God with fresh dependence and devotion. In that sense, the judgement was actually going to be merciful too (something we can overlook when praying for mercy and expecting it to be rosy!). As we referenced recently in our open letter to the church ([www.bit.ly/ifb-open-letter](http://www.bit.ly/ifb-open-letter)), we believe that the UK is past the point of being able to escape God's further judgement entirely, but we can pray for it to be lessened by the nation and the church responding quickly to it rather than blindly stumbling on through it.

God said in Amos 4 that He had struck Israel with a series of incremental judgements, but that on each occasion she hadn't returned to Him, so He was going to have to bring a more fearsome judgement upon her that would finally get her attention. If we get the message from Him sooner, and truly repent by His grace, we can receive His healing and bandaging of our wounds rather than experiencing further injuries. But for this to happen, the church has a vital role to play – is it ready?

## **A CHALLENGE FOR THE CHURCH**

### Time to wake up

As believers and as a body, we are called to intercede for authorities and the nation, to sound the alarm as those who have heard God's prophetic warnings, and to challenge sin as salt and light in a dark and tasteless society. We are meant to be watchmen who observe things in the nation and listen for God's voice, then act and speak out in response.

However, all too often we are asleep or at least drowsy, blissfully ignorant about the state our nation is in and the reasons behind it. For all our activity and apparent church life, it's possible to be dead and asleep like the church at Sardis (Revelation 3:1-3). They were oblivious not only to what God was doing but also to their own spiritual condition, so they were unfit to get their own house in order, let alone the houses around them!

Ambivalence towards our own spiritual state and that of the church and nation is a great danger which holds us back from praying and receiving God's answers. We need our eyes to be opened so that we see the full extent of the situation and are moved to respond. God called for wailing women to move His people to tears over the ruin they and particularly their children had come to (Jeremiah 9:17-18), and implored them to recognise His judgement of them and call a fast in response (Joel 1:13-14).

Another danger is resignation, where we see that there is a problem but simply resign ourselves to whatever God may choose to do. While it is absolutely right to trust and respect God's will, Scripture shows that we are not to sit back like Eli (1 Samuel 3:18) but are to implore the Lord for mercy, knowing that He takes our prayers into account in some way in His decisions, as He did when Moses interceded for the idolatrous Israelites. Indeed, as we seek His will in how to pray, we can discover ways to effectively move His heart. As Joel said when calling for the prayer and fasting when national judgement seemed certain, "Who knows whether He will not turn and relent...?" (Joel 2:14).

A third danger we face is weariness. We may recognise the danger, and believe that prayer is important, but feel too weary of the spiritual battle to be able to engage in it effectively. Some intercessors have prayed and mourned over sin in our nation for decades, and this may feel like just another election – just another point marking a further departure from the nation's biblical foundations. But people's lives, children's futures, eternal destinies and God's glory could all be affected by the government and MPs who come to power on 5th July, and by people's responses to the increasing crises we're facing.

## Signs in London

On 24<sup>th</sup> April, highly trained horses from the Household Cavalry threw their riders and bolted through the streets of London. Two of them particularly caught the nation's attention through vivid photos and videos: a black horse called Quaker ("shaking"), and a bloodied white horse called Vida ("life"). As they ran unchecked around the capital, damaging vehicles and bringing traffic to a standstill, Big Ben's clock stopped working for a time, then the bells sounded eleven chimes when it was ten o'clock.

While such events can be interpreted in various ways, and believers need the Holy Spirit and God's word to guide any conclusions made, these simultaneous events would strongly suggest they were more than just a coincidence, as even secular commentators suggested. We believe God was giving a merciful warning that the nation is in the eleventh hour (not the tenth as believers may think), and that further – possibly sudden – crises are imminent (like the conflict and famine represented by white, red and black horses in Revelation 6).

As end times prophecies are being fulfilled and Christ's return approaches, it's clear from Scripture that we can expect more difficult times to come, besides the particular judgements a nation may experience at any time in history. God has warned us of everything beforehand, and has also promised that He "does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). Various prophetic words in recent decades have been given as warnings to any believers who will listen, and the recent events in London should serve to warn us that God's prophetic words are about to be fulfilled. If the sleeping church is to rise to the challenge, much prayer will be needed!

## How we might pray

We must each seek God's help and leading to know how to pray, and to pray from the right hearts. However, in the light of all the above, we would suggest the following prayer points as a general guide, praying for ourselves, the church and the nation to:

- 1) Wake up to the fact that the UK is desperately sick;
- 2) Recognise that the sickness is incurable and will naturally only get worse;
- 3) Acknowledge that the sickness is from God, and is due to our sin;
- 4) Feel that sickness as our own, and mourn and grieve over it before the Lord;
- 5) Stop looking to any human remedies for healing;
- 6) Do what the Doctor says in order to be healed: repent.

We should also pray for believers to prepare their hearts for difficult times to come, and to be delivered from the dangers of ambivalence, resignation and weariness in prayer.

In all of this, we can hold on to the fact that God is merciful, and can follow in the footsteps of Habakkuk, who accepted and prepared himself for national calamities while still crying: "In wrath remember mercy!"

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