

Intro:

Today I want to begin a series for Christmas called *Christ and the Nations*. Our emphasis this Christmas will be on Christian missions and the mission on which our Lord Jesus came into the world. These missions are one and the same:

1 Timothy 1:15 This *is* a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

Our emphasis is on the work of Christ among the nations of the world.

This mission, gathering a people for his name out of the nations is one prophesied by the OT prophets but barely understood by them and certainly not understood by the nation of Israel at large.

If the Israelites had a vision of the blessing of Messiah on the nations, it was a blessing imposed by force when the victorious Messiah ruled the nations as King.

Instead, God had a quite different plan in mind, one that occupies our attention now.

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Have you ever wondered how many nations there are? [Even if you haven't, I'll attempt to tell you.]

This answer was given on an internet "answers" web-site:

"The United Nations has 192 members...

"The IOC Olympics have 203 members. The reason they have more is many colonies and dependencies are permitted to host their own Olympic teams and athletes even if such competitors hold the same citizenship as another member nation. Examples of this include territories such as Puerto Rico, Bermuda, Hong Kong, Eritrea and Timor all of which compete as separate nations despite being legally a part of another country. The Marshall Islands will compete in 2008 for the first time.

"The biggest membership for a 'world organisation' is FIFA with 205 members. Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland competing as separate nations increasing their figure higher than the IOC where they compete together as Great Britain and Northern Ireland."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <http://uk.answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20061116093428AABTPtGt> (accessed: 12/1/07)

So how many nations are there? Well, there is some disagreement but it appears there might be around 200.

The American Heritage Dictionary gives this definition of the word 'nation':

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**na·tion** (na'sh?n) n.

1.
    - a. A relatively large group of people organized under a single, usually independent government; a country.
    - b. The territory occupied by such a group of people: *All across the nation, people are voting their representatives out.*
    - c. A federation or tribe, especially one composed of Native Americans.
    - d. The territory occupied by such a federation or tribe.
  2. The government of a sovereign state.
  3. A people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language; a nationality: "*Historically the Ukrainians are an ancient nation which has persisted and survived through terrible calamity*" (*Robert Conquest*).
  4.
    - a. A federation or tribe, especially one composed of Native Americans.
    - b. The territory occupied by such a federation or tribe.<sup>2</sup>
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When we talk of 200 nations, we are talking about the first two definitions. But what about the third definition? It is under that definition that we have at least two and possibly many nations in Canada.

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nation - c.1300, from O.Fr. *nacion*, from L. *nationem* (nom. *natio*) "nation, stock, race," lit. "that which has been born," from *natus*, pp. of *nasci* "be born" (see *native*). Political sense has gradually taken over from racial meaning "large group of people with common ancestry." Older sense preserved in application to N.Amer. Indian peoples (1650). *Nationality* "the fact of belonging to a particular nation" is from 1828. *Nation-building* first attested 1907 (implied in *nation-builder*). *National* is from 1597; *national anthem* first recorded 1819, in Shelley. *Nationalize* "bring under state control" is from 1869.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> nation. Dictionary.com. *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/nation> (accessed: December 01, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> nation. Dictionary.com. *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper, Historian.

If we take the ‘racial’ meaning of nation (‘people who share common customs, origins, history, and frequently language’) how many nations would there be?

“The World Christian Database holds information on over 13,000 people groups. These people groups are distinct ethnic and/or cultural peoples that are bonded together by race, tradition, history, and culture. [There are 157 such groups in Canada.]”<sup>4</sup>

There are many nations in the world by this definition.

What is the inherent idea in the notion of nations? You know that there has been talk about ‘one brotherhood’ and talk of unity and peace in the world by some.

So what idea is represented by nations, nationalism, and nationalities?

### ***DIVISION***

Where did the division come from? Whose idea was nations anyway? What was the purpose?

We are going to answer these questions today as we begin to work on the theme of Christ’s mission in the world, *Christ and the Nations*.

Read Gen 10.1-2, 6, 21-32

**Proposition:** The division of mankind from God and his purpose produce the division within mankind so that men might seek God instead of self.

### **I. The emphasis of division**

- A. The ‘isles’ of the Gentiles divided (Gen 10.5; ‘isles’ = ‘nations’)
- B. The sons of Ham divided in their nations (Gen 10.20)
- C. The sons of Shem divided in their nations (Gen 10.31)

In this chapter, ‘Gentiles’ is applied only to the sons of Japheth, but all nations except Israel came to be seen as Gentiles.

- D. The families of the sons of Noah divided in their nations (Gen 10.32)

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<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/nation> (accessed: December 01, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> <http://worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/about/people.asp> (accessed: 12/1/07)

- E. The time of division: the days of Peleg, son of Shelah (Gen 10.25; 'Peleg' = 'division')
1. Likely division occurs just before the birth of 'Peleg'
  2. His brother, Joktan, means 'smallness'

The theme of this chapter, the meaning of all these names, the thread of division through the chapter, all of this emphasizes *division*.

The world as we know it, divided, fighting, striving, competing is emphatically born in this chapter.

## II. The cause of division

### A. The immediate cause

1. The command of God – renewal of Adam's commission (Gen 9.7)
2. The response of Man – rejection of God's plan (Gen 11.1-6)
  - a. One language, one speech
  - b. "Let us..."
  - c. "Behold, the people *is* one"
3. The judgement of God – confusion of speech, formation of nations (Gen 11.7-9)
  - a. "Let us"
  - b. "Scattered"
  - c. Babel = 'Gate of God', possibly from 'Balal' = 'confuse by mixing' [Babylon = Gk. form of Heb. Babel]

### B. The imminent cause

1. Compare story of cursing of Canaan (Gen 9.20-27)
2. The two stories are kind of 'bookends' for the genealogy of ch 10
3. Note the implications of the curse of Canaan
  - a. Canaan shall serve his brothers
  - b. Canaan shall dwell in the tents of Shem as a servant

The curse implies distinctions of peoples, as nations – the division is yet some years and some generations away, but intended by God nonetheless.

4. Note the theme of sin in both 'bookends'
  - a. Ham's sin
  - b. Man's sin at Babel

### C. The ultimate cause

1. Adam: I will; God: you will go
2. Cain: I will; God: you will go
3. Antediluvian people: we will; God: Noah will go
4. Postdiluvian nations: let us; God: No, let us

Two true statements concerning the cause of division among mankind:

- Sin is the cause of division among mankind; it is the cause of nations.
- God is the cause of division among mankind; it is the purpose of God.

## III. The purpose of division

- A. God's curses of sin are intended to make life difficult
  1. Adam: 'cursed is the ground'; Eve: 'cursed is childbirth'
  2. Ham: 'cursed is Canaan, a slave will he be'
  3. Babel: 'cursed is mankind'
    - a. Cursed to misunderstanding and confusion
    - b. Cursed to competition and conflict
    - c. Cursed to ambition and overlordship

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<sup>NAU</sup> **James 4:1** ¶ What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? <sup>2</sup> You lust and do not have; *so* you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; *so* you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.

<sup>NAU</sup> **Malachi 2:10** ¶ "Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?"

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Now we see that this is the immediate effect and purpose of God's curse of man's sin.

But we also believe the Bible, that God is good.

Is God just trying to make life difficult for us? God forbid!

Job observes of God:

<sup>NAU</sup> **Job 12:23** He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away.

## B. God's curse is intended to make men change

### 1. God separated the nations to choose one nation

**Deuteronomy 32:8** When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.

### 2. God separated the nations to motivate repentance

a. Paul's sermon on Mars Hill (Ac 17.26-27)

b. James sermon to the Jerusalem Council (Ac 15.16-17)

What should the nations do with all the frustrations of language, culture, race, ambition, etc.?

- Turn to God.

What should they do in Sudan over the school teacher who 'insulted the prophet' over the teddy bear she allowed her students to name 'Mohammed'? What should the teacher do?

- Turn to God.

What should Hamas, Hezbollah, Al Qaeda, and, yes, even Israel do with the frustrations they have with one another?

- Turn to God.

What should *you* do with the misunderstandings, frustrations, divisions, conflicts you have with your family members and church brethren?

- Turn to God.

*God is the answer...*

#### IV. The cure of division (Gen 11.10 “These *are* the generations of Shem”)

- A. After the division, the Lord turns again to Shem — why?
- B. The Lord is selecting a people, a nation, a land, *a man*
1. Terah begat Abram (11.26)
  2. The Lord said to Abram (12.1)
  3. And *in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed* (12.3)

### Conclusion:

You and I are part of those warring, fighting, jostling, competing, striving nations.

When you are confronted by your own ‘nationhood’ — your ‘me-first’ attitude — you are confronted by your need for the living God.

You need the living God who has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and who will come as the King of kings – king of all the nations.

Do you bow before him today?