

3. The significance of nation

politics, government & nationhood - 5

(a) Tribe vs. Nation

Tribe: strong natural bonds, but weaknesses (e.g. Judges)

Nation: e.g. Israel under David & Solomon

- Banishes violence to its boundaries
- More able to defend itself from external threat
- Kinship still powerful... but a higher unity... which can welcome outsiders
 - o e.g. Ruth 1:16, "Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

(b) Nation vs. Empire

Boundaries can be widened only so much without internal bonds being stretched to breaking point → empire

Empire = no commitment to shared place/birth/heritage

- o coercion...
- o no principled reason to stop growth / domination

Imperial thinking:

- Roman Catholicism and Islam
- Modern trans-national bodies (e.g. EU, WEF)

Vs. Reformed/Protestant → nation / national-ism

(c) Valuing the nation: being part of something bigger

* Heavenly citizenship *relativizes* but does *not remove* bonds of nature like family, clan and nation *

Nations: why do they matter?

Acts 17:26-27

While waiting to begin

- Do you belong to a nation? What does that mean in practice?
- What difference does it make that you are a Christian?

1. Definition: What do we mean by "nation"?

(a) "nation" in Scripture

= a specific nation... or gentile nations... or all people "nations"

(b) part of a network of belonging

"clans... languages... lands... and nations" e.g. Genesis 10:5,20,31

"from every tribe and language and people and nation", Rev. 5:9

(c) distinguish "nation" from...

- empires
- the State
- a modern "country"

2. God and the nations

(a) God determines the nations

Genesis 10:32, "These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, in their nations, and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood."

Acts 17:26, "And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place,"

(b) God judges the nations: they are moral entities

Under the law of God, like individuals

Examples:

- Babel (*Genesis 11*): judgement on an imperial project
- Oracles against the nations (e.g. *Isaiah 13-23*)
- *Proverbs 14:34*, "righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."
- *Titus 1:12*, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."

(c) God redeems nations

ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:2-3, "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Genesis 22:18, "and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice."

ISRAEL

Exodus 19:5-6, "Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

JESUS

"seed" of Abraham (*Galatians 3:16*) & true Israel

THE CHURCH

Matthew 21:43, "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits."

1 Peter 2:9, "... a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation..."

Ephesians 2:14-16, "one man" Jew and Gentile

Philippians 3:20, "your citizenship is in heaven" also *Hebrews 11:13,16*

NEW CREATION

Isaiah 65:17, "new heavens and the new earth"

Isaiah 60:5b, "... the wealth of the nations shall come to you."

Isaiah 66:18, "... the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory,"

Revelation 5:9, "... you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,"

Revelation 21:24-26, "By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations."