

THE NATIONS GENESIS 10:1-11:9

In my Bible this section of Genesis is entitled, “The Table of Nations.” This keeps us from seeing this section as simply another dry genealogical table. It is not an attempt to report all of the sons that the three sons of Noah brought into the world but it is rather an attempt to help us understand the origin of the nations of the earth. There are seventy names found in this tenth chapter of Genesis. So, there are seventy national entities involved. The number 70 suggest that the Lord wanted us to see it as representing the whole of the earth. Seventy is the multiple of ten and seven. Both numbers signify completeness. According to the New International Version Study Bible, “The 14 nations that came from Japheth plus the 30 from Ham and the 26 from Shem add up to the seventy.” They are listed in that order with the descendents of Japheth and the nations that came from him appearing first, and the nations that came from Shem appearing last. This is true because from this point onward in the Bible the focus will be on the sons of Shem. The nations coming from Ham and Japheth will fade into the background as God’s redemptive purpose is unfolded in the book.

This section helps us understand the make-up of a nation. Moses reports as he lists the sons of Japheth this, “From these maritime peoples spread out in into their territories by their clans within their nations, each with its own language.” So we see in a nation there are these unique identities – geographic identity, ethnic identity, a political identity and a linguistic identity. The things that set one nation apart from other nations are its geography, its ethnicity, its political life and its language. When Moses wrote Genesis he could identify then at least seventy nations that

had come through the descendants of Noah. The number of nations in the world in our day is constantly changing. My father shared with me that the author of Megatrends some years ago is now projecting that there will be as many as 2,000 nations in the earth in just a matter of years. We do know that through the break up of the Soviet Union and other crises around the world the number of nations has multiplied greatly in recent years. In fact, it is not uncommon to see some nation listed in the daily paper that you have never heard of before.

The position of these paragraphs in the scriptures gives us some basic understanding of the purpose of God as it relates to nations. Since each of us have citizenship in a nation, it is good for us to know the mind of God concerning nations.

I. HUMANS ARE DIVIDED INTO MANY NATIONS BUT THEY ARE STILL ONE FAMILY.

This is a basic lesson we need to learn from this early section of inspired scriptures. In the day of Moses, as we have already noted, he could identify seventy national entities that had come into being through the descendents of Noah. These seventy made up the whole of the human family in that day. Each of these nations had their own political structure, occupied their own geographical section of earth, developed their own culture, and spoke a separate language. As you traveled across that ancient world you would be impressed with the diversity among the nations. This reality continues until the day in which you and I live. Though there has been some impacting of the nations by two or three dominant nations in our day, so much so that you can find McDonalds and Coca Cola almost over all the earth and in all the nations. You will still be impressed by the diversity of the nations. They still have a separate culture and in most cases

speak a unique language. They may be so small that their numbers are numbered in thousands rather than millions or billions, but they still have their own unique identity.

However, we must not allow this obvious diversity to overshadow the profound truth that we are still one family. These seventy nations that Moses could identify all went back to one man and his three sons. Each nation was either a direct descendent from Japheth, Ham, or Shem. They must all look back to the same father – Noah. Even though we have more than seventy nations on the earth tonight, there is still the same reality – we are one family.

This has a lot of implications for us. There have been some like Adolph Hitler who sought to make one nation superior to all the other nations and to maintain what he perceived to be a national racial purity. But the unshakable truth is that the citizens of every nation are related to us. They are actually cousins. If we trace their history back far enough we find that we all came from the same family. Since this is a reality, there is no place for that evil national pride or racism that rears its ugly head in generation after generation. We are many nations but one family.

II. THE MANY NATIONS ARE EVIDENCE OF GOD’S JUDGMENT ON HUMAN PRIDE.

We must not see chapter eleven as being separate from what is reported in chapter ten. The familiar incident that took place in chapter eleven predates much of what you find in chapter ten. The division of the family of Noah into different nations, speaking different languages,

occupying different geographical parts of the earth, actually took place because of what is reported in chapter eleven.

The first hint that the human family was in for some more difficult days appears rather early as Moses lists the descendents that came from Ham. When it comes to Cush in verse 8 he mentions that he is the father of Nimrod. Nimrod, according to the inspired record, was the first mighty warrior on the earth. He is reported to have been a mighty hunter before the Lord. This man Nimrod is responsible for the establishment of Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calnehn, Shinar. He also went to Assyria, where he built Nineveh, Rehobath, Ir, Calah, and Resen.” Nimrod was the founder of some of the most famous cities of the ancient world, mainly Babylon and Nineveh. These two cities would become great political centers and financial powers in the ancient world. Babylon would be the capital of the kingdom of Babylon and Nineveh would become the capital of the kingdom of Assyria. They had to trace their history back to a proud and arrogant warrior king who suppressed others around him until he established a great influential kingdom. So the nations that dominated the world in the ancient day found their beginning in the heart of a man who was seeking to establish himself as a mighty influence.

We see it even more clearly in the incident that brought the judgment of God at Shinar. Moses reports that before the descendents divided up into separate families they came together on the Plain of Shinar and entered into a compact with each other. They began to make bricks and to build a tower in the midst of a city they had built. It was their intention that the tower would reach to the heavens. “So that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.” It had been God’s instruction to Noah that his descendents were to

scatter over the earth and to subdue it, but these who gathered on the Plains of Shinar had a better idea. They thought they would gain strength if they could maintain their unity and stay in one geographical locale.

The tower that they proposed to build was not actually to reach up through the skies into heaven itself. Rather it was the kind of structure that archeologists have uncovered over that part of the ancient world. It was a tower with a shrine on top of it. They were called ziggurats. Usually on top of these ziggurats there would be things that indicated the worship of the sun and the moon and the stars. These men were proposing to build a religious center that would hold the peoples together in one nation. They were doing this in rebellion against the Creator God. What we have in this inspired record is the fall of the nation that parallels the fall of man in Genesis 3. Not only has man fallen individually, he has also fallen collectively. He has rebelled against God in this heart as an individual but he has also rebelled against God as an organized society.

When God saw what ancient man was attempting to do, he responded in judgment. The judgment of God brought about the many nations that make up the earth. “That is why it was called Babel because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.” This is something that we have forgotten about our world. The present condition of our world divided into multiple nations speaking multiple languages is a constant reminder that God has acted in judgment. The whole of the human family has been affected by the fall of human society. So the whole of the human family stands in the same relationship to the Creator God, guilty of sin and in need of mercy.

III. GOD'S SAVING PURPOSE INCLUDES ALL NATIONS.

Let's step back and look at this passage in a greater context. The last of the sons of Noah to be mentioned with his descendents is Shem. Immediately after the report of the confusion of languages at Babel the scriptures give us the descendents of Shem which lead up to the birth of a man named Abram. This descendent of Shem who lived in Ur of the Chaldeans received a word from God. This word from God that came to Abram led to the formation of the nation of Israel. The word that came from God to Abram in the Ur of the Chaldeans promised that, "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and who ever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." The word translated "peoples" is actually the word translated "nations" in most places. God promised that all of the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham.

How were they blessed through Abraham? You must read the rest of the Bible in order to find the answer to that question. It all culminated when through the descendents of Abraham at last Mary of Nazareth gave birth to a son in Bethlehem. This daughter of Abraham gave birth to the one through whom God provided salvation for the peoples of all the earth. Jesus was from the nation of Israel but he was for the whole world. He came to die not for just the sins of the descendents of Abraham, but for the sins of all the descendents of Noah. He died for the descendents of Japheth and Ham as well as Shem.

Interestingly before Jesus went back to heaven His final commission to his disciples was to take his gospel to all nations. So the story that begins concerning nations in Genesis chapter 10 is

continued on the Mount of Olives by the Son of God as He sent His disciples with His gospel to all nations.

This has not changed. The peoples of all nations are still one family. The peoples of all nations still share one need – salvation. The people of all nations can still be saved through one Savior, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. It is our assignment from God to see that the peoples of all the nations have the opportunity to receive Jesus as their Lord and their savior.