

Scriptures and Doctrine :: God, judgement and the nation state.

God, judgement and the nation state. - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/9/2 6:15

Behind several recent threads there is question that I ask myself. What is the biblical revelation of God's behaviour towards the nation state and what does he require of the nation state? In answering that question I have to ask myself what is a 'nation' as the Bible uses that word?

The word that is usually translated 'heathen' or 'Gentiles' in the OT scriptures is the word 'goy' or its plural 'goyim'. My Bible software tells me that the word is used some 559 times in the OT with various KJV words being used to translate it. Total number of verses = 511 (559 total words)

another = 1

Gentiles = 30

heathen = 143

nation = 109

nations = 265

people = 11 As far as I can tell whenever we get the word 'Gentiles' in the OT this is the word that is used. The first use may be helpful, especially for users of the KJV and NKJV. "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations." (Gen. 10:5, KJVS) In this verse the same word is translated first as 'gentiles' and then as 'nations'.

Israel too is called a 'nation' "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel." (Ex. 19:4-6, KJVS) This is an important verse as it shows God separating (making holy) a single nation from the whole family of nations. From this time forward the whole of humanity would be either from 'the' nation or from 'the nations'; they would be Israel OR the nations... the whole world from this point would be Israel and the Gentiles.

Here is my first answer to my own question. Israel was a 'nation' which became God's nation. What kind of 'nation' was Israel before Sinai? It was a 'people group', an ethnic entity. It was a nation without territory and without the power of self determination. It was a 'nation' under the domination of another 'nation' but it was a 'nation' nevertheless. It had no legislature and no government, but it was a nation. It was a 'nation' within a 'nation' but it was still a nation. It was a 'nation' that became God's nation under the strict terms of a very clear covenant, but even before that time it was an identifiable people group. "God assayed to go and take him a nation from the midst of another nation," (Deut. 4:34, KJVS)

I hope this will not muddy the waters, but it was not simply a 'race'. One of my favourite OT characters is Caleb. He was chosen as the representative of the tribe of Judah when Moses sent 12 such representatives into Canaan to spy out the land. He obviously enjoyed the confidence of the 'princes of Judah'. The 'prince' of Judah at this time was Naashon, but according to the criteria of choice for the representatives each of the 12 "Send thou men, that they may search out the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel. Ye shall send a man of every tribe of his fathers, each a prince among them. And Moses sent them from the wilderness of Paran: according to the commandment of Jehovah, all of them heads of the children of Israel." (Num. 13:2-3, DRBY) There can be no doubt that Caleb was at the very heart of the tribe of Judah. The extraordinary thing is that Caleb was not a direct descendent of Judah; his father was a Kenezite. "Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD." (Num. 32:12, KJVS) and Kenaz was a descendant of Esau not Jacob. (Gen. 36:15) Whenever the scriptures refer to Othniel, Caleb's younger brother, they refer to him as a son of Kenaz.

How could a descendent of Esau have become so embedded in the tribe of Judah that he became their unique representative at a time of crisis? Here is my hypothesis, for what it is worth... Pharaoh's invitation for Jacob to take up residence in Egypt was as follows "And take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land." (Gen. 45:18, KJVS) Exodus 1:5 tells us that Jacob's blood descendants, who 'came out of his loins' were 70 souls, but the invitation of Pharaoh was not only for blood descendants but for their entire households; this would have included many who were not blood descendants but who were fully part of the household. If we recall Abraham's story we remember that these shared circumcision with Abraham. The multitude then that gathered at Sinai to become 'the holy nation' were not only blood descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but

included people like Caleb who was thoroughly integrated into the tribe of Judah, but whose ancestry was not forgotten.

'nation' then, as used in the OT, is not race or bloodline. It is not statehood, or self government or legislature. It is not territory or defined borders. What is it? it is a 'people group', distinguishable from other 'people groups'.

There are however times when the word 'nation' is used in a way which is much more in line with our modern concept. "So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail, very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation." (Ex. 9:24, KJVS)

"And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations." (Jer. 25:12, KJVS)

"And it shall come to pass, that the nation and kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, saith the LORD, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the pestilence, until I have consumed them by his hand." (Jer. 27:8, KJVS) But these are really 'kingdoms' and the concept of a modern democratic nation state is not to be found in the scriptures. In a modern democracy, as far as God perceives things, just where does 'the buck stop'. I really find it very difficult to map OT biblical concepts of 'nation' to our modern concept of the 'nation state in its own territory'. If we try to interpret Katrina as an OT style judgement, just where does 'the buck stop'? Please understand that what follows is not an attack on another 'nation's' culture but should the judgments not have fallen upon New Orleans mayor? or its state governor, or on the Federal Government, or upon Mr Bush? Why is Idi Amin sunning himself in Arabia when his country when through two generations of bloodbaths as a result of his actions?

And all this is just from a struggle to understand our own world from an OT biblical perspective; what about the New Testament which seems to have no interest at all in 'nation states'? Please 'talk' to me and explain why you believe what you believe in this whole area.

For those, like myself, who see the images of Louisiana with a heavy heart and a cry for God's mercy may I point you to (https://www.sermonindex.net/modules/articles/article_pdf.php?aid14837) time to pause and think. I wrote this the day after the Asian Tsunami before the body count was multiplied by ten. I 'felt' it was something God gave to me, perhaps for such a time as this...

Re: God, judgement and the nation state. - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/9/2 13:23

Hi Bro. Ron,

I think to bring fulness to this whole study it may be helpful to view the other side of the coin which is God's 'blessing' of a 'nation'. Much of the reason why many Christian American's view this as 'judgment' is because of an underlying belief that God has 'blessed' America, and all the goodness that America has achieved has been by the hand of God's blessing (so to speak). Modernists don't believe this, but most Christians do.

Hence, the whole "God Bless America" and all the other like songs. To be consistent with this view- when great calamity comes- it is easily assumed to be God's judgment, especially when the behavior seems to parallel some of what we read about in Genesis 6 and Genesis 19. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever, etc. It seems to make sense, that as a City or America drifts away from God- that He would intervene.

I suppose the full implication of what I am thinking (out loud here) is that we cannot rightly on the one hand say we are blessed of God as a nation, based on the belief that this nation was founded on Christian values by godly men, and then not think when the whole of the nation including the Church at large seems to be drifting away from God, that He would not likewise chastise? I doubt I could make a strong enough case to convince anyone of this from the New Testament, but it is truly the feeling of many.

Make sense?

God Bless,

-Robert

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/9/2 14:21

Hi Robert

Quote:
-----I suppose the full implication of what I am thinking (out loud here) is that we cannot rightly on the one hand say we are blessed of God as a nation, based on the belief that this nation was founded on Christian values by godly men, and then not think when the whole of the nation including the Church at large seems to be drifting away from God, that He would not likewise chastise?

I take your point.

This morning my wife was reading Spurgeon on Psalm 1. It included this little quotation from Sir Richard Baker. Verse 4. Chaff. Here, by the way, we may let the wicked know they have a thanks to give they little think of; that they may thank the God for all the good days they live upon the earth, seeing it is for their sakes and not for their own that they enjoy them. For as the chaff while it is united and keeps close to the wheat, enjoys some privileges for the wheat's sake, and is laid up carefully in the barn; but as soon as it is divided, and parted from the wheat, it is cast out and scattered by the wind; so the wicked, whilst the godly are in company and live amongst them, partake for their sake of some blessedness promised to the godly; but if the godly forsake them or be taken from them, then either a deluge of water comes suddenly upon them, as it did upon the old world when Noah left it; or a deluge of fire, as it did upon Sodom, when Lot left it, and went out of the city. Sir Richard Baker. The point that Baker is making is that the ungodly are 'blessed' as a result of their proximity to the 'godly'.

America has been blessed, and so has the UK. For many reasons I think, not least because "he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt. 5:45, KJVS) That is to say God blesses the good and the evil; God is like that. He delights to bless. It is interesting that this verse does not say the opposite; that all share God's wrath against the evil man.

I do believe that God's special blessing of his children has a spill over effect to those around them. I believe that God may have other purposes in blessing the USA and UK which has to do with a language which is available for worldwide evangelisation. Maybe you know that some see a strong correlation between Rome and Greece with USA and UK. There are so many similarities between our day and that of the early church that it sends a shiver up my spine.

So I think a case might be made for expecting God's blessing but not inevitably sharing signs of God's displeasure. Part of the reasoning behind my thread was the question whether or not the USA is a 'nation' as the Bible uses that word or whether it might not be a mixture of many nations. I am still questioning the legitimacy of whether or not a modern democratic nation state in its own territory is what the Bible has in mind when it speaks of 'nations'.

Re: - posted by RobertW (), on: 2005/9/2 15:30

Hi Ron,

Quote:
-----Part of the reasoning behind my thread was the question whether or not the USA is a 'nation' as the Bible uses that word or whether it might not be a mixture of many nations.

Yes. I recall at the Messianic Institute how that a certain Jewish woman would refer to us non-Jews as the 'Goyim' and it was an abusive term really. Almost a "we are the Jews- they are the Goyim" ('goi-yeem' for those who may wonder how that sounds). Their contention seemed to be that there were only two peoples' the Jews and the Goyim (non-Jews). From here it gets complicated because of the theological position they held that the goyim assimilated into Israel in Messiah, etc. Therefore the term 'Goyim' really came to mean 'heathen nations' or non-God fearing peoples (as I understand it). Believers in Messiah were not considered 'Goyim' they were non-Jewish believers in Messiah. Whew that's a mouthful! Hence a total avoidance of the name 'Christian.'

Re: - posted by TheophilusMD (), on: 2005/9/2 17:36

Philologos wrote:

Quote:
-----That is to say God blesses the good and the evil; God is like that. He delights to bless. It is interesting that this verse does not say t
he opposite; that all share God's wrath against the evil man.

If calamities such as tsunami, katrina, etc. are not judgment calls of God, can we call these mercy calls instead? Indeed it is the presence of God's people among the nation states that affect the future of the whole nation state. God deals with a nation or nations but only as a direct or indirect consequence of His dealings with His church. Take for example these passages:

Quote:
-----2And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no.

3And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live. (Deut. 8:2-3)

It was the Lord who brought them to the wilderness, revealed Himself in such a mighty way but in the process affected those nations states around them. In whatever way other people were affected, God's eyes were always on His people, His kingdom, His glory even as His purposes as stated above are accomplished.

I believe that in preserving and purifying of a remnant and to make for Himself a glorious testimony, God sent famine as a mercy call to the nation of Israel during Elijah's time. It was, however, the beginning of the fall of Ahab and Jezebel.

9/11 could be viewed in the same way. It is the Lord's way to wake His people up and to show us that the military (Pentagon) or economy (World Trade Center) are really just sinking sand and that if we boast, we boast in the Lord alone.

Does this make sense?

Re: - posted by philologos (), on: 2005/9/2 17:53

Quote:
-----I believe that in preserving and purifying of a remnant and to make for Himself a glorious testimony, God sent famine as a mercy call to the nation of Israel during Elijah's time. It was, however, the beginning of the fall of Ahab and Jezebel.

“For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” (Heb. 12:6, KJVS)
We must ever keep in mind that 'God is love' and all that he does must be consistent with all of his character. 'Judgement' too must be an expression of God's love. “...from his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he loved the people;..” (Deut. 33:2-3, KJVS) This does not mean that we can always 'join the dots' but it does mean that God did not run out of patience and just 'snap'.

God's disciplinary judgements of his people in Old or New Covenant were always remedial. I know that 'judgement' is coming, but does he not reign as a priest upon a throne of grace?

Re:, on: 2005/9/2 23:21

Brothers, thanks for the discussion. I learned a lot. I want to sincerely thank you Philogos(sorry don't know your name and the other guy).

I agree with the idea that the "Nation" concept is skewed. I like to point the issue of this Hurricane from a different light though. Whether a specific judgement or a judgement, or a natural occurrence, HOW MUCH MORE CLEARER COULD IT BE FOR US TO BEND OUR KNEES AND GIVE IN TO GOD? INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY! If we can't learn of our feebleness of our hands and minds, When will we learn as a human race?

I am only saying this in the light of what some are already heralding they are going to do. Remember during the Sept 11 attacks. And just a few days afterwards, what the President and the mayor said, that they would build a bigger and better building. and then, there were the bumper stickers that everytime I saw I wanted to weep that said: "THE POWER OF PRIDE". Just in the same fashion, some most probably will want to rebuild New Orleans, making its levees bigger and stronger and better. Because OUR FINGERS ARE OUR GODS. I personally could care less about the discussion of what a "NATION" is supposed to be, (though, again I am grateful for the insight)- what I am grieved about is this sense of pride - that we in our feeble hands can do anything with our hands. IF YOU THINK GOD WILL PUT UP WITH THAT, Look at Rome, Russia, and every other civilization that lifted its nose and shaken its finger directly or indirectly at God.

About two weeks ago, I wrote a comment stating how wicked and sick we are in our thinking. Put your thinking caps on with me for a second.

In the old days, multitudes worshipped the Sun, the Moon, the Stars, Clouds, just natural phenomenon. Oh we scoff at them now saying they were pagans. they don't know anything. NO! I say, there was a certain wisdom in that. They at least knew in and of themselves they would not be able to create anything with their feeble hands things that could make a change in their life. OH, but we are much better now because we can send people to the moon! Ok too much writing.. you get the idea... Please have mercy on us my Savior. starting with my ignorance and disobedience

Re: good thread - posted by baruch_48, on: 2005/9/4 1:42

good thread, brother philologos

I appreciated these points -

Why is Idi Amin sunning himself in Arabia when his country when through two generations of bloodbaths as a result of his actions?

Maybe you know that some see a strong correlation between Rome and Greece with USA and UK. There are so many similarities between our day and that of the early church that it sends a shiver up my spine.

your reference to Idi Amin is such a good point to be reflected upon

also, your reference to Rome Greece America Britain is great ...

my main focus is actually studying historically America's place in the history of the west and what it means - in God's eyes

I think your shivers are highly highly justified

I'd always been just lumping Britain in with America as both just a part of an overall 'Rome' influence ... but I think Britain as Greece is excellent - it lines up quite well, I think

thanks,

Baruch

Re: God, judgment and the nation state, on: 2005/9/4 9:06

Quote:
-----It was a 'nation' that became God's nation under the strict terms of a very clear covenant, but even before that time it was an identifiable people group.

In the same way as people were joined to Israel through human relationships (family, master-servant and receiving 'strangers') does the New Testament answer with terms like 'the household of faith', Gal 3:28, references to membership of the 'body of Christ'? And a re-application of the spirit of Old Covenant attitudes?

James 1:27

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Are these some of the criteria which make the Church an 'identifiable people group'?