

National Suffering

Before delving into the topic of national suffering, here is a reminder of why we are dealing with “suffering.”

Romans 8:16 The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children (*teknon*) of God,

Romans 8:17 and if children (*teknon*), heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

Although the suffering in Romans chapter 8 is dealing with individuals, it is instructive to review suffering on a national scale. The first question that arises is “what is a nation?”

1. Nationalism as Divine Institute

There are several “institutions” devised by God for the benefit of mankind. Different pastors and theologians identify a different number of them. As R. B. Thieme Jr. taught, there were four:

1. Free Will
2. Marriage
3. Family
4. Nation

Others will define them differently. The focus here is on “nation.” Here is what is meant by nation from two different sources.

“A **nation** is a type of social organization where a collective identity—a national identity—has emerged from a combination of shared features across a given population, such as language, history, ethnicity, culture,

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territory, or society. Some nations are constructed around ethnicity (see ethnic nationalism) while others are bound by political constitutions (see civic nationalism).¹” (Wikipedia)

“Nation: a collection of tribes that shared a common language, a common religion, heritage, and culture. Joining together in common cause against common enemies.”² (Robby Dean)

There are four items that are key to our understanding of the concept of a nation: language, history, ethnicity and territory. I learned these in high school. Wikipedia includes those. Let us see what the Bible has to say about these.

First, we have language. God gave us languages. Initially after the fall of Adam and Eve, people had a single language. After the Tower of Babel revolt against God, God imposed different languages.

Genesis 11:1 Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words.

Genesis 11:2 It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there.

Genesis 11:3 They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn *them* thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.

Genesis 11:4 They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city, and a tower whose top *will reach* into heaven, and let us make for

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation>

² <https://deanbible.org/dbmfiles/slides/2020-HowShouldWeThenVote-017.pdf>

ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

Genesis 11:5 The LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.

Genesis 11:6 The LORD said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.

Genesis 11:7 Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.”

Genesis 11:8 So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

Genesis 11:9 Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of the whole earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of the whole earth.

Babel. The word Babel, according to the text, is taken from the Hebrew word for confusion. God imposed the confusion on the people because of their disobedience. They were supposed to fill the earth. From the people’s perspective, the tower was to reach to heaven. Babel also meant

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Gate of God (Bab el) in Akkadian. From the people's perspective they were being hostile toward God in that they were building a tower to heaven and thereby making a name for themselves. They were staying in one place in violation of God's command to fill the earth. They did this apart from God's participation.

What the people of Babel did was similar to what Satan did.

Isaiah 14:12 “How you have fallen from heaven, O star of the morning, son of the dawn! You have been cut down to the earth, You who have weakened the nations!

Isaiah 14:13 “But you said in your heart, ‘I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, And I will sit on the mount of assembly In the recesses of the north.

Isaiah 14:14 ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.’

The people, on their own effort, were following in the arrogance of Satan.

Interesting to note that there was a Chaldean account of the tower of Babel included in a book by George Smith *Chaldean Account of Genesis* pp158-166³ It is fragmentary, but sufficient text remains to see the parallel to the Genesis account.

The resultant mix of languages is what we have today. Although the translation of the Hebrew word is “confused,” it is obvious that the languages have families. What I remember from other Bible classes is

3 <https://archive.org/details/chaldeanaccounto00smit/page/158/mode/2up>

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that some attempt to classify language into three broad families: Indo-European, Semitic and Afro-Asiatic. This tends to follow the three sons of Noah: Japheth, Shem and Ham.

God's intent was that mankind would "fill" the earth. This intent was expressed before the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Genesis 1:28 God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

This intent was expressed again after the flood.

Genesis 9:1 And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."

The people who built the tower of Babel were attempting to get to heaven on their own efforts. They were disobedient to God's instructions to Adam to "fill" the earth.

The population of the earth is composed of descendants of Noah's sons.

Genesis 9:18 Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan.

Genesis 9:19 These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.

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The next chapter identifies the nations that were descendants of the sons of Noah. Genesis chapter 10 is sometimes called the “Table of Nations.” It identifies nations as derived from the offspring of the three sons of Noah. Each son is given a paragraph. At the end of each paragraph is a summary about the nations.

Japheth:

Genesis 10:5 From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.

Ham:

Genesis 10:20 These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations.

Shem:

Genesis 10:31 These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations.

Note the inclusion of “languages” as a key to the nations.

Sons of Noah Summary:

Genesis 10:32 These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.

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Israel as a nation:

Genesis 12:1 Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you;

Land. A nation requires a land on which to reside.

Genesis 12:2 And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

The point being made here is that nations were established by God and are consistent with His plan for mankind. Note the repeated use of “land.” This is the territory criteria of nation. So we have ethnicity (sons of Noah), language and territory.

Now let us move on to national discipline. First we will look at the Biblical perspective of discipline for the nation of Israel. Then, we will apply the principle embodied in the Bible to other nations.

2. Five Cycles of Discipline

I first encountered the concept of the five cycles of discipline from R. B. Thieme Jr. It is not something he made up. It is clearly revealed in Leviticus chapter 26. Although the numbering of 1-5 is not included, it is implied by the text.

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A. Scripture (Leviticus 26/Deuteronomy 28)

After identifying blessings for obeying God (Leviticus 26:1-13), the text turns to the other side, disobedience.

First Cycle of Discipline:

Leviticus 26:14 ‘But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments,

These commandments are identified in the Mosaic Law. This applied to Israel only.

Obey. This is the word for hear. The way it is used in this context is translated correctly as “obey.” This word helps set the boundaries between the “cycles” of discipline. It also implies that God is talking, communicating to mankind. Too often we do not listen.

Leviticus 26:15 if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, *and* so break My covenant,

My covenant. This is the Mosaic Covenant. This applies to Israel only. This does not negate the use of the principles encapsulated here against Gentile nations.

Leviticus 26:16 I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.

Leviticus 26:17 I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you.

Second Cycle of Discipline:

Leviticus 26:18 If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

Leviticus 26:19 I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze.

Leviticus 26:20 Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit.

Third Cycle of Discipline:

Leviticus 26:21 'If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins.

Leviticus 26:22 I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and

reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted.

Fourth Cycle of Discipline:

Leviticus 26:23 ‘And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me,

Leviticus 26:24 then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins.

Leviticus 26:25 I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands.

Leviticus 26:26 When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied.

Fifth Cycle of Discipline:

Leviticus 26:27 ‘Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me,

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Leviticus 26:28 then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins.

Leviticus 26:29 Further, you will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you will eat.

Leviticus 26:30 I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols, for My soul shall abhor you.

Leviticus 26:31 I will lay waste your cities as well and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your soothing aromas.

Leviticus 26:32 I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it.

Leviticus 26:33 You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste.

The Bible sometimes gets graphical in descriptions. God needs to impress on our minds the terrible things that man does to man when he rejects God and God's divine laws. Josephus documents terrible things that happened when the Fifth Cycle of Discipline was applied to Israel in 70 A. D. I did not quote the story of a woman who killed and ate her

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infant. When God allows for the destruction of a nation, the events that take place are horrifying.

B. The Law as stated does not apply to Gentile nations. The covenant and associated commands, ordinances and statutes apply specifically to Israel. However, the principles behind them can be applied to the nations. Also, keep in mind the blessing and cursing associated with Abraham.

Genesis 12:3 And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.”

But, we know from history that nations rise and nations fall. Nations that fall are often destroyed unmercifully. The point is that we should be motivated as Christians to serve God faithfully. The alternative, being hostile toward God has dire consequences.