

The Nations

“In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent”
(Acts 17:30).

Two things in our nation concern me: A flood of anti-Semitism sweeping across America, and the crass adoption of a secular worldview in evangelicalism. Both are due to a deliberate rejection of a biblical worldview. Both express rebellion against God. And dire, dreadful consequences await. So, what we need to do is review the Bible’s plot-line to see how we today must think and live. In this study, we will endeavor to understand God’s relationship to the nations, because out of it will come lessons that are essential to us.

God created humanity so that man would serve God in the way God willed, and in return he would be blessed by God’s glorious, infinite Being. There was to be intimate *koinonia*, fellowship between the Creator and His special, unique creatures who reflected (the “image of God”) His invisible Being in this physical, time and space created world. The Fall (Genesis 3) disrupted that and blocked mankind from receiving creational blessing, but the remainder of the Bible narrates the long story of God’s work of love not only to reclaim His disobedient and rebellious creatures but to wonderfully bless them. Love seeks to bless others and meet their needs, however unworthy and unlovely they may be.

After the global Flood judgment, humanity divided up into discrete nations (Genesis 10 and some in 11). But the Tower of Babel episode resulted in dispersion of the nations into all the world. At that point, God abandoned those nations in their rebellious state, placing them under the governance of created, transcendent, invisible beings called *elohim*, or gods. (See Deuteronomy 32:8,9; Psalm 82; and Isaiah 40:23. In his letters, Paul refers to these *elohim* as “principalities and powers.”) The Gentile nations of earth thus are (still) ruled by powerful *but wicked*, spirit beings.

God then chose one man, Abraham (Genesis 12 on), and then his descendants, the Nation of Israel (Exodus 19 on), to serve Him in two ways, by reflecting His glorious Person in the world, and by taking the knowledge of their God, the invisible Creator God, to all those nations. God took Israel to be His own people and He committed himself to them by means of covenants. From the call of Abraham on, it was God’s intent to reach out to all the nations on earth, to all of His beloved human creatures, so they could be blessed.

But there was also to be opposition. Another theme of Scripture, a conflict between good and evil, already evident from its opening pages, became overt. “I will bless them that bless you and curse them that curse you,” means that the work of Abraham and his descendants was to take place in a world of evil and hatred. The gods of the nations would seek to deny those under their wicked governance from choosing to ally with Israel and Israel’s God. Israel might have to suffer to serve God as intended. To be on the side of good may mean sacrifice and suffering, but also blessing. To be on the side of evil will result in being cursed by the sovereign God.

Israel failed. The Nation of Israel recapitulated the fall of Adam in the Garden. Someone had to obey God in this physical world! So, in great humility the eternal Son left heaven to be incarnated and make reconciliation and redemption possible, so that a people would be fit to be blessed with God’s Person. Jesus became a 2nd Adam and the embodiment of Israel—an obedient, loyal, and righteous servant Israel. He fulfilled the oracle of Genesis 3. And He is the promised seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:3). Jesus is also a greater Moses leading a better Exodus, and a greater Joshua effecting a greater Conquest. The Old Testament is an incomplete book, a book of failure, because the fulfillment of God’s purposes were there only anticipated. So Israel is in Exile (a figure of death—separation from God), set aside as a judgment while God works His will thru the Church.

The era from the Exile on, right up to today, is termed in Scripture the “Times of the Gentiles.” In the Book of Daniel God reveals a program of a succession of Gentile nations, empires actually, that would dominate the known world, trample on and threaten Israel’s existence, and oppose God and His purposes. Babylon, then Persia, Greece, Rome and finally a cluster of Rome-like nations, would control the world’s culture, thinking, institutions, religion and governance. The Times of the Gentiles is a period of violence, war, hatred, greed, and wickedness. Yet it’s also an era of great accomplishment. Commerce would flourish, for example. Roads and bridges and aqueducts and architectural wonders would be built. The Gentile nations would seek to aggrandize themselves in display of their prodigious abilities to make marvelous works. But during this entire era, they are opposed to God and His will. They are tightly controlled by their gods.

The Times of the Gentiles is a prolonged era that reprises on a vast scale the Tower of Babel episode. Except Israel, all nations that exist today (including America!) are participants in this program for the Gentile nations.* The Day of the Lord will terminate the Times of the Gentiles. Jesus will return, end Israel’s Exile, bring the Times of the Gentiles to a violent end, and initiate the prophesied Messianic Kingdom on earth. God has already judged the proud, idolatrous, rebellious Gentile nations.

This Church Age is superimposed on the Times of the Gentiles and the Exile of Israel. God’s intent for the Church is to take the Gospel to all the nations of earth (Matthew 28: 18-20; Acts 1:8).** It is God’s expectation that certain ones, the elect, will respond with faith in Jesus and be rescued from certain future judgment. Paul understood this (see Acts 17:30). Followers of Jesus, united to Jesus’ Spirit, fulfill this *missio dei*, the great work of God to bring humanity to Himself for blessing. So salvation is on offer to all the people in the Gentile nations of earth. Those who refuse the offer have been condemned. And what about Israel?

In justice, God must deal with His rebellious human creatures. The global Flood in Genesis was proleptic of a greater, future world-wide judgment. The Day of the Lord will be a time of ghastly judgments, narrated in vision form in the Book of Revelation (Chapters 6-19). It will, though, in God’s goodness, be a time of great salvation. Many will die, but many individuals will be saved. It will also be time of terrible persecution of Israel (Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24; and elsewhere). Some Gentile nations will seek to totally annihilate Israel, to wipe out all Jews; other nations will seek to protect or support her during this time of terrible tribulation.

When Jesus returns to earth, He will deliver a fiercely persecuted, repentant Israel to enjoy their promised Kingdom. The exalted King will rule over all earth for a thousand years, the Messianic, millennial Kingdom (Revelation Chapters 19,20). But first, Jesus will judge the survivors of the tribulation period. He will judge Gentile survivors whether they supported Israel or not (Matthew 25:31ff), and He will judge Israelite survivors whether they have a heart for Him or not (Ezekiel 20:30ff). Those who pass the judgment enter into the messianic, millennial Kingdom in their un-resurrected bodies. These people will populate the future, earthly Kingdom in physical bodies, have children, and reconstitute the nations of earth. So, nations populate earth during the future Kingdom. Gentiles from all over earth will

* In the millennia since Genesis 10, those original 70 nations have gotten scrambled. How this works out for God’s program for the Gentiles isn’t revealed in Scripture.

** The Hebrew words translated in English Bibles as “nation” are *goy*, *am*, or *mishpacha*. These 3 however also can mean “people” or an ethnic group. (The *goy* word always means non-Israelite, that is, Gentile.) It’s the context that determines if the word used means “nation,” that is, a geopolitical entity, or “people.” For example, When Egypt is referred to, that’s obviously a “nation,” for it has territory with boundaries, a capitol city, a ruler, and an army. In Greek, the word *ethnos* also can mean either “nation” or “people.” The translator can (and often does) err in choosing which English word to use, and that creates confusion. *Ethnos* is used in Revelation 20 and 21, and although English translations use “nations,” it can mean people, *esp’lly* its use in Revelation 21.

acknowledge Israel as the chief of nations and Jesus as their righteous King (see especially Zechariah Chapters 8-14).

At the close of the thousand years, another rebellion will occur. Certain of those who lived in physical bodies during the Kingdom era will oppose the exalted Jesus, led by a loosed, enraged Satan. The rebellion of course will be dealt with, and a New Heaven and New Earth, physical structures, will then replace the present creation. And in this new creation, a real physical place, we will still be embodied, though it will be a resurrection body, like that of Jesus. (We are not a soul within a temporary physical casing; to be human is to be an embodied soul: the two together, united forever.) And so we'll enjoy being with God, blessed with His presence, forever. We don't spend eternity in heaven, but in the New Jerusalem, the new creation, the eternal kingdom. And this eternal Kingdom too, will be populated by both Jewish and Gentile peoples.

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The anti-Semitism now erupting in the Western world should be understood in the context of the Bible's meta-narrative. Contempt or hatred of Israel identifies individuals (and nations) as anti-theistic and exposed to God's wrath at the (soon-coming) Matthew 25 judgment. Anti-Semitism reveals contempt for God himself and for His redemption program. Anti-Semitism in the church betrays Jesus. The eternal Son came to earth as a Jew, identified (and still does) as Jewish, indeed as the very embodiment of Israel. So to despise Jews is to despise Jesus. Anti-Semitism in the church must be a marker of lack of conversion, profession of faith notwithstanding.

God has not kept to himself His purposes for creation. The first few chapters of the Bible reveal in terse, narrative form, what God is doing. He is obtaining a bride for the Son. Let's review it here:

God has a son, Adam. God, the father, loves the son and wants him to have a bride. The bride is God's gift to the son so that the son may be fulfilled. So God makes for the son a bride. A third character is involved, a wicked supernatural being who attacks the bride. As a result of that evil attack, the bride is radically changed so that she then acts treacherously toward the son. And as a result, and because the son loves his bride, the son in justice suffers terribly, death even. And the bride suffers too for what she did. But in the end, the two are restored and united. The wicked creature will be defeated, and the bride will have a unique role in bringing about that defeat.

This drama is historical, yet it's also proleptically the story of the Bible. It's the story of redemption, the story of God's Kingdom program, and the story of God's rest. The entire Bible recapitulates the drama of Genesis 2 and 3, except that the "son" is the eternal Son of God, and the bride is God's elect thru all the ages. One huge difference however is the son, Adam, dishonored his father, whereas the eternal Son honored the Father (with trust, love, obedience, etc). And another difference is, the Bride for the eternal Son is regenerated, made into a new creation, then united to the Son. The wicked being is Satan, and he will be disposed of as God also defeats evil so that only good, *His* goodness, exists forever.

There's more. In Genesis 24, Abraham sends his servant to obtain a bride for Isaac. This too is proleptic of God's *missio dei*. The story of the Nation of Israel recapitulates both the primal drama and the search for a bride. The purpose of the Church also is to recapitulate the search for a bride. The Nation of Israel is God's servant, Jesus is God's Servant, followers of Jesus are God's servants, and during the Tribulation Period, God will have servants then too. The closing chapters of the Bible reveal: Mission accomplished! The Son has His bride.

There's no place in the Church for secularism, for worldliness, or for indifference to God's purposes. We're not here to live in comfort in the same lifestyle and with the same worldview as our secular neighbors. We're here on mission! The Church has one mission, and it's finding and preparing a Bride for the Son from among the nations on earth. In the one task assigned to us, God's great purpose for His creation, let's be faithful