

Prayer Letter 3

Excerpts from the book "Pray for the Nation" (chapter 9)

3. God of nations

Does God deal with nations, or is He only concerned with individuals? In the Old Testament we read of many examples of God dealing with nations: Israel, Egypt, Arabia, Chaldea (Babylonia), Assyria, Media, Persia (Iran), Greece, Syria, Lebanon, etc. But what about in New Testament times – did the God of nations then become merely the God of individuals? The answer to this question is "No!", as we shall see.

In Jeremiah 18:7-10 we read some very important words, because they are addressed to "A NATION" at "ANY TIME" – they are thus permanently relevant – today, not just 2500 years ago! God said, "If at any time I declare, concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, and if that nation concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will repent of the evil that I intended to do to it. And if at any time I declare, concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will build and plant it, and if it does evil in My sight, not listening to My voice, then I will repent of the good which I had intended to do to it."

This is, in fact, a shorter and more generalised form of what God told Israel centuries earlier, which says in essence, "If you are obedient as a nation, you will be blessed; if you are disobedient you will be punished; but if you repent, I will forgive you" (Leviticus 26:3-13, 14-39, 40-45). That is, "repent of evil or face judgement!"

Proverbs 14:34, again written about "A NATION" and "ANY PEOPLE" (not just Israel), says, "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach (disgrace) to any people."

The judgement and punishment of sin are inherent in the sin itself. All sin brings its own guilt, defilement and punishment because all sin is contrary to God's perfect will and therefore hinders His blessing, spoils His plans, and separates us from Him.

Galatians 6:7-8 puts it quite clearly, and although written about "a man", it applies also to a nation: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

A nation's attitude towards Israel

Psalm 33:12 reminds us that "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord." While this no doubt refers primarily to Israel, it is also true that our nation will be blessed to the extent to which we make God the Lord over our nation, following His laws, and worshipping and serving Him as Lord.

Part of this involves blessing Israel as a nation. God said to Abraham, "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. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse those who curse you. Through you all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:2-3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:2-4; Galatians 3:8). A nation's attitude towards the nation of Israel is thus very important! Also see Jeremiah 12:14-17 and Joel 3.

God's Sovereign rulership over nations

Daniel (2:21; 4:17,25,32; 5:21) clearly shows that God has absolute and supreme authority in the raising up and putting down of kings and those in authority in nations – nothing is outside His control. Psalms 46:10; 47:1-9; 75:6-7 and Proverbs 16:33 confirm this.

Paul also affirms this in Acts 17:26-27 when he says that God "made from one (Adam) every nation of men, to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation." In other words, God controls the borders (boundaries) of nations, and the times allotted for each regime!

David prophetically declared that blessing comes to a nation when its rulers rule justly, ruling in the fear of God, but godless people are to be rejected for they will inflict pain on a nation (2 Samuel 23:2-7)

Hence, in broad terms, God commands us to honour, respect and obey those in authority over us (Romans 13:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-17), except when they clearly order us to disobey God Himself (something which is outside their God-given authority to do!) See, for example, Acts 4:18-20; 5:28-29). Hence, also, Paul's injunction to pray for good and Godly leaders (1 Timothy 2:1-4)

Biblical descriptions of nations

The Bible describes nations in various ways. Which do you think are most appropriate for your nation?

Neutral descriptions: strange, ancient.

Good descriptions: righteous, holy, great, strong, mighty, wealthy.

Bad descriptions: nation of fierce countenance, void of counsel, ungodly, sinful, hypocritical, rebellious, bitter and hasty, crooked and perverse, foolish, defiled, divided, uncircumcised (heathen).

Jesus spoke of the dangers of a kingdom being divided against itself (Matthew 12:25-26; Mark 3:24; Luke 11:17-18). "United, we stand; divided, we fall!"

The writer to the Hebrews says that through faith we can subdue kingdoms (Hebrews 11:32-33). In other words, no matter how oppressive a regime, our faith can enable us to still be victorious!

Finally, Revelation 11:15 reminds us that one day "the kingdom of the world shall become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever." "At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow ... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippines 2:9-11)