

“EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW”

What on earth is God saying about discipling the nations?

by Ern Baxter



Every knee should bow... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

We tend to think of that New Testament scripture in a second coming or judgmental context. But if we trace its Old Testament roots, we find it was written in a gospel context. Isaiah 45:22-23 says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth....That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear."

Before history winds down God will have a people who as the ultimate prophetic community will so obey Him and respond to the authority of His Word as to bring the nations into obedience to Jesus Christ. That community will be the delegated authority of God in the earth, which will speak to the nations, minister to the nations, heal the nations, and bring the nations under the rule of Jesus Christ. The Son will then offer the world up to the Father and He will receive it gladly as the work of His hands.

As part of that prophetic community, we must be informed, instructed, and inspired by the Word because the Word is ultimate. It is the final authority in all matters of what God is like, what man is like, and what nations are like. Because God intends to use us to affect the nations, we must see what God is saying through His Word about the nations and how He intends to deal with them.

God Creates Nations

First, I want to look at the nations providentially. Psalm 24:1 says, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." The world belongs to God. The Scriptures demonstrate that He creates nations; they don't just happen:

Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem

and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was populated (Gen. 9:18-19 NAS).

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 (Gen. 10:5 NAS).

These are the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, by their nations....These are the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, by their lands, according to their nations. 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 (vv. 20, 31-32 NAS).

Then in Psalm 86:9, we read, "All nations whom Thou hast made shall come and worship before Thee, O Lord; and they shall glorify Thy name" (NAS). God has proprietary rights to all nations because He made them. They didn't come about by a fortuitous concurrence of atoms. They are the product of God's creative, providential purpose.

But God has not only made the nations—He has historically determined their geographical boundaries and their time periods. Acts 17:26 contains the finest account of the divine philosophy of history in the entire Bible:

And He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation (NAS).

God Chose One Nation

In all His creation, God made a

sovereign choice of one nation. Deuteronomy 32:8-9 says:

"When the Most High parcelled out the nations, when he dispersed all mankind, he laid down the boundaries of every people according to the number of the sons of God; but the Lord's share was his own people, Jacob was his allotted portion" (NEB).

When God made the nations, He made them in terms of some kind of angelic oversight, which the rest of the Bible bears out. But He reserved for His own immediate oversight the nation of Israel, which He chose not because it was greater or better, but out of the sovereign good pleasure of His purpose. He chose it to be the instrument of His communication and purpose to the world. "What advantage then hath the Jew?" says Paul. "Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:1-2).

In Job 12:23 we read, "He makes the nations great, then destroys them; He enlarges the nations, then leads them away" (NAS). God determines history. History is not happenstance. It is tied in with the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. God has said, in effect, "I started this and I will perpetuate it until I'm ready to stop it. But I do not offer it to anyone else's jurisdiction."

Christians need to look soberly at what goes on throughout the world, for the earth is the Lord's. He sustains it; He administers it; and He has a purpose for everything He is doing. When history winds up through all the labyrinthine perplexities that historians have wandered, they will look back with wonder as they see a pattern of infinite intricacy that God has woven through the centuries. But if we as God's people do not believe He rules the nations, there is not much use for us to respond to His commission to preach the gospel to and to disciple all nations.

The Delegates of High Heaven

The Church is the prophetic community that shares in the oversight of the nations. We are not a bunch of slaves and underlings wandering through life aimlessly. We have dignity and poise as the sons of God. We are the delegates of high heaven. We stand and minister in His courts daily and go forth from His high presence to walk the highways of earth and speak into history as those who have been inspired in a prophetic community by the prophetic voice. We are the elect; we are the people of God; we are corulers with King Jesus. We are the men and women through whom history is going to be made. We are the people of God! We are important!

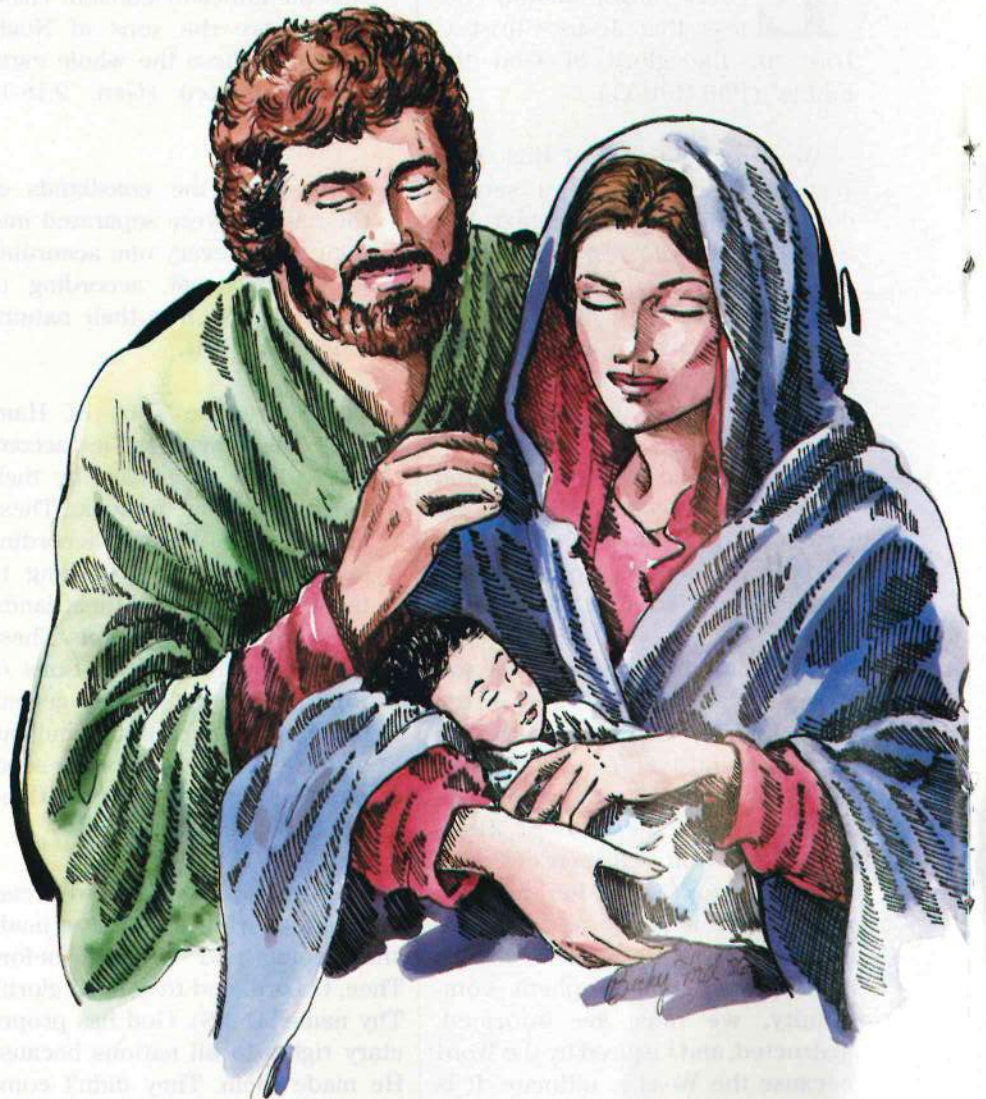
When we were converted to Jesus, we were called, as Lazarus was called, out of the tomb. D. L. Moody once said that if Jesus hadn't specifically said, "Lazarus, come forth," the whole graveyard would have come forth. All of us who name the name of Christ are the result of a direct command of God, who stood at the tomb of our spiritual deadness and cried our name, and we came jumping out in our grave clothes and stood there mumbling through our face cloth until godly men came and let us see light.

When Lazarus came out of the tomb he didn't have much light, but he had life. Jesus said, "Come forth," and there he stood bound with his face under a cloth. Interestingly, Jesus didn't go up and unwind him and take the cloth off his face. He turned to His disciples and said, "You loose him. You let him go." It's our job to take off the face cloth and unwind it.

Our destiny is something more than being a little knot of people waiting to die and go to heaven. We are here to light the earth and salt the world, and under God, make history, more so than anyone else.

Haggai 2:7 says:

"And I will shake all the nations;



and they will come with the wealth of all nations; and I will fill this house with glory,' says the Lord of hosts" (NAS).

Can we latch on to that? That word is spoken out of revelation to our faith. It's not grandiose talk. It's the Word, which was given to those who would become the molding force of God in history, and we are that people.

Acts 14:16 says, "And in the generations gone by He permitted all the nations to go their own ways" (NAS). At times God permits nations to do things that are unseemly. That's part of His program—to let them fill up the cup of their iniquity to the brim. But while they are thinking they are

filling their cup and getting away with it, the enemy is subterraneously coming in under their palace. As the ancient king sat drinking wine from the golden goblets of the sanctuary, he looked up and saw handwriting on the wall and wanted to know what it meant. But even as he was reading the handwriting on the wall, the enemy was coming in through secret tunnels under the city to take his kingdom.

We don't know how God does things. That's entirely His business. Our business is to become a vital, participating part of a prophetic community that gets excited about everything that happens in the world because it knows that God is exercising His rulership over the nations. Nothing happens by chance but

by a grand design that was patterned before the world began. All things are operating under the counsel of His will. Whatever happens, we can get excited about it because back of it is the God who judges the nations.

The Redemption of Nations

We have looked at the nations providentially, and now I want to look at them in terms of redemption. We are inclined to preach a gospel of individual salvation, which is proper but not total. In the process, we've lost something. We've been so busy getting people saved that we have forgotten that God is the God of the whole earth. He is interested in what goes on in Washington, Moscow, and Peking because He has ordained the men who are there.

In Psalm 67:1-2 we see how God's redemptive plan relates to the nations:

God be gracious to us and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us—that Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations (NAS).

God's saving way among the nations must come out of the blessing that rests upon the redeemed community. That is based on the promise to our forefather Abraham in Genesis 18:17-18:

And the Lord said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, since Abraham will surely become a great and mighty nation, and in him all the nations of the earth will be blessed?" (NAS).

I have a hard time handling the exclusivism I hear coming from some Evangelicals. Jesus Christ tasted death for every man. When He sat down at the right hand of God as a prince and a Savior, He reached down and wrote His signature across the earth. He said, in effect, "I've placed My name over every nation. I claim every one."

That was His perfect right, for the Father had said to Him, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Thine inheritance" (Ps. 2:8 NAS).

God's purpose is to save the nations. If we doubt that, we can't obey the great commission. If we don't believe it is God's purpose to save every last man and woman in the earth, then we are not fit vessels to bear the gospel proclamation. It is God's purpose to exercise His sovereign election and selection, not mine. It is my business to speak to the nations and tell them to come under the lordship of Christ.

The Projection of Redemption

The projection of this redemption is found in Isaiah:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it will come about that in the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it (Is. 2:1-2 NAS).

God has spoken infallibly through the prophets. He is going to put His government at the top of all the governments, and the nations are going to flow unto it. He is going to bring nations to bow their feet before King Jesus at the trumpet voice of the prophetic community of His redeemed people.

Isaiah 25:6-7 says:

And the Lord of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine. And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations (NAS).

God will not only remove the veil from Israel, but He will see to

a mass salvation of the Gentile nations. Someone might object, "Baxter, you don't read the newspapers. Things are only getting worse." I read the papers, and I watch the evening news, but I don't get my theology from either of them. I turn from their squalid, confined conjectures to the brilliant, revealed declarations of the God who makes history.

The Faith Factor

When Mary, the little peasant virgin, stood before that great imposing angel and asked, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?" the angel said, "The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (Lk. 1:34-35). She still didn't understand the mechanics of it, but she let revelation speak to faith. She looked back over history to the degree she knew history and couldn't remember a single instance in which any woman had had a child apart from cohabitation with a male. But because she had a faith factor in her constitution, she responded to the revelation: "Be it unto me according to thy word" (v. 38).

When God says He's going to bring the nations under His government, my first response might be, "But I don't know how You're going to do it."

And He would say, "I will perfect my prophetic community until its voice is like a trumpet and its example is as pure and crystal as the little virgin girl. The power of the Holy Spirit will come upon it and there will be a time in history when I will do a work and it will be light at eventide. I will establish My government and the nations will stream to it."

I don't know how it's going to happen but I believe it.

Jesus said, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Mt. 28:18-19 NAS). And He meant just that. It is a crying shame for us to bring that high mandate down to a place where it becomes a matter

of handing out a few tracts to salve our conscience. A mandate is resting on us as a prophetic people that requires that we disciple the nations of the earth.

I can understand when the spies went in to spy out the promised land and saw what they saw, men twice as tall as they were, walled cities that they had never even imagined, and chariots with human-sized projections from their wheel hubs that would cut them off at the ankles, that they returned and said, "We can't go in there. They'll eat us."

But God said, in effect, "You don't understand. I told you that I have given you the land. I have put the fear of you in them. I don't care if they're three miles tall, and the walls are six miles wide. I am speaking out of My ultimate authoritative word into what should be a faith receptacle, and I'm saying to look at My word and go in and take that land. If you're going to look at those giants and those walled cities instead of looking at My word, you're going to come up with ten thousand rationalizations why you shouldn't go in. But if you'll go in on the strength of My word, and one of those big fellows comes up and confronts you, you can just look up at him and blow on him and he'll fall over. I assure you."

We say, "Well, God, I don't know. I never saw a giant fall over when I blew on him." That's the problem, isn't it? It's hard for us to respond in faith to a revelation of God if we don't have a precedent to support it.

Practical Suggestions

In light of God's revealed will for the nations we as His people can take some practical actions. Here are six:

1. Think biblically of the nations, not politically, economically, or culturally. We must amass in the storehouse of our treasure all those scriptures that tell how God esteems the nations, and then start to think

biblically of them.

2. Contribute to the unity of the witnessing prophetic community. Jeremiah 4:1-2 says:

"If you will return, O Israel," declares the Lord, "then you should return to Me. And if you will put away your detested things from My presence, and will not waver, and you will swear, 'As the Lord lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness; then the nations will bless themselves in Him, and in Him they will glory" (NAS).

We must do everything in our power to bring about the renovation, restoration, and adjustment of the redeemed community, working avidly and industriously at breaking down the causes of disunity. It is only as the redeemed prophetic community is functioning in the purity of its calling that the nations will hear the trumpet call of the gospel.

3. Consider ways to address the nations. We've given altar calls for years on a Sunday night, with one or two dribbling up to the altar, while the nations have become further entrenched in darkness. But Psalm 2:10 says, "Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; take warning, O judges of the earth" (NAS). Addressing the nations falls primarily to the Church leaders, so we must pray for them that they will know how to speak the word.

4. Proclaim truth as it relates to every area of life: economic, educational, political, and social. The lordship of Jesus Christ is not just over a soul that's going to hell; it's over an entire being that needs to function under the government of God.

5. Remind the nations of what they've forgotten. Psalm 9:17 says, "The wicked will return to Sheol, even all the nations who forget God" (NAS). I'm glad for men who are reminding the nations of what they've forgotten. I'm glad for men

with moral courage in politics who have stood up and under the fire of nasty and cheap darts of critics boldly and straightforwardly have said to America, "You have forgotten the sanctity of human life, the sanctity of the human body, and God's right to declare His law." When we call a nation back and remind it of what it's forgotten, we stand in the true tradition of the prophetic community.

6. Engage in regular and unceasing community prayer for all men and leaders. First Timothy 2:1-4 says:

I urge that entreaties and prayers...be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, in order that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved (NAS).

Until we respond to that mandate, we have no right to criticize a nation. We have no right to point a finger of scorn at a rotten politician until we have corporately importuned God to release righteousness into high places.

The time has come for us to be more than a soul-saving force. The time has come for us to be a nation-saving force, a world-saving force, to become a community that represents the Word of God, which says that all nations shall come to Him. We are the prophetic instrument to bring it to pass. □



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