

God and the Nations

God's Providence
God's Judgment
God's Sovereign Rule

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by Mark W. Weaver

TOPIC

Introduction - Finding comfort in troubled times.

Part I Get Understanding - Should we not be like the ancient men of Isaachar, who understood their times and knew what needed to be done?

Part II A Quick Look at God's Providence - What is Providence? Does God guide history? How does He make provision for His future plans?

Part III A Quick Look at God's Sovereignty - Why are some stars brighter than others? Some nations stronger than others? Is God truly Lord of all?

Part IV Judgment Upon the Nations - Why do nations exist? Is international strife part of God's design? Does God move one nation to bring His judgment upon another?

Part V How Does God Wield Authority? - What is authority? How has God divided it among us mortals?

Summary - The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.

GOD AND THE NATIONS

INTRODUCTION:

Finding comfort in troubled times

*men of Issachar,
who understood the times
and knew what Israel should do ..."*

I Chronicles 12:32

AT THE TIME of this writing, our nation is at war. It is a war unlike any we have fought in our history. We are engaged not only on foreign soil with guns and bombs, but we are fighting at home as well. We have taken extraordinary measures at our airports, in our public buildings, and anywhere a crowd is likely to gather. Our leaders have become exceptionally vigilant, always looking out for the enemy in our midst. As citizens, we are living a bit more on the edge, at once more aware of the dangers, and yet perhaps resigned to the reality of evil nearby. In these troubling days, it can become difficult to see beyond the latest news report or press briefing.

Comfort Found in the Scriptures.

As one who has studied some history and examined a good amount of Scripture, I have been comforted as I reflect upon the Sovereignty and Providence of God. Over the years, I have been privileged to sit under the teaching ministry of some very gifted people of God who have helped me to understand, to some degree, a few of His ways. Today I feel burdened to share some thoughts and insights regarding God's dealings with nations and king-

doms. It is my belief that these insights, drawn from Scripture and history, can help reinforce our faith and strengthen us in the comfort and assurance of His care over our lives, as well as His care for all of humanity, in these treacherous times.

The brief commentaries which follow are drawn from a teaching I provided at a recent small group meeting. I will not be focusing on whether our political leaders are making the right decisions politically or militarily. Neither will I be deciphering newspaper accounts and prognosticating where we are in some sort of an "end of the world" timeline. I will simply be providing Biblical principles for you to contemplate and consider.

The material which follows is presented in five parts:

- **Part I:** The Importance of Understanding Things from a Godly Perspective
- **Part II:** The Providence of God
- **Part III:** The Sovereignty of God
- **Part IV:** God's Perspective on the Nations
- **Part V:** The Nature of Godly Authority and How God uses Godly Authority to Achieve His Providential Purposes in the Earth

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART I: GET UNDERSTANDING

Should we not be like the ancient men of Isaachar,
who understood their times and knew what needed to be done?

NO. 1: Here in 21st century America, at any given time of the night or day, just about anyone with a television can tune in to one of several news channels and obtain the latest report on the War on Terror. With reporters bringing us blow-by-blow descriptions of the war in progress on various fronts, we do not lack for information. But as easy as it is to learn the details and specifics from the comfort of our homes, it is difficult to discern the heart of God in this matter. In that pursuit, where better to turn than the Scriptures?

The book of Acts tells us of the Bereans who "... searched the Scriptures daily ..." (Acts 17: 11) Above all sources of knowledge, we must, like the Bereans, search the Scriptures to gain understanding.

We can learn from a prayer of Moses, recorded in the Psalms, how important it is for us to possess Godly wisdom. He said, "*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*" (Psalm 90:12) Gaining a heart of wisdom should be a lifetime goal as we pursue a relationship with God. Likewise, the writer of Proverbs instructs us to get understanding.

"My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding, and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding, and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God." (Proverbs 2:1-5) We can learn also from Ezra, the High Priest, who "...set his heart to study the law of the LORD and to practice it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel." (Ezra 7:10)

So then, as we wade through the news re-

ports and the daily editorial print and airwave commentaries, and tune into to our radio and television talk-show favorites, let us be careful to sift all that we hear and read through the filter of the Holy Scriptures. For it is through them that we gain true wisdom and understanding.

No. 2: No doubt, sometime in your life, you have heard someone use the word "Providence." But what is it? The Merriam Webster's Dictionary defines Providence this way: "The act of providing or preparing for future use or application; a making ready; preparation." The idea of Providence, or God's guiding hand, has almost been lost in modern Christendom.

Roger Hazelton, in his book, *God's Way with Man: Variations on the Theme of Providence*, says this: "Is God in actual control of human destiny? Does he take anything like a personal interest in the course of events? Can he be counted on to support and undergird our striving after good in the face of so much that is plainly evil in the world we have to live in?" Our generation can make no claim to having seen any more evil than the evil seen by preceding generations. But we have seen it. So, where is God? It is my hope that in these few brief commentaries, our faith can be increased to see more clearly that our God, the God of Providence, is at work in the world.

Providence can be seen throughout the Scriptures. Let's look at one example. Jacob's son, Joseph, was sold into slavery by his brothers and through a series of events that could only have been orchestrated by God, ascended to the position of second in command of all of Egypt. When famine came, as he had predicted, his brothers arrived in Egypt seeking help. They did not know that the man they were speaking to was their brother and he did not reveal him-

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self to them until they had suffered a great ordeal. When at last he did reveal himself, he concluded his revelation by saying, "... *You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good ... I will provide for you and your children.*" (Genesis 50:20) Note his reference to "providing" for Jacob's children. Thus is the essence of "Providence," that God "provides" through His divine orchestration of events so as to accomplish His purposes among the nations.

No. 3: *"The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young."* (Deuteronomy 28:49-50) In this passage, as Israel is about to enter Canaan, God issues a warning. He says that if Israel does not obey Him, He will bring a nation against them. We know of course from history that sadly, God's promise came to pass. (see 2 Kings 17:6) Regarding Providence, we note that it is God Himself who moves this nation "from far away" to come and bring Israel to judgment.

"Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father." (Matthew 10:29) If God is guiding the life of a sparrow, how much more will He watch over nations?

"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases." (Proverbs 21:1) Read also from 2 Chronicles 36:15-23. Note especially verse 22: *"... in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm..."* In Old Testament times, God moved upon the hearts of kings and leaders to achieve His will. Do you re-

member the passage in Exodus (9:12) where the Scriptures proclaim that God hardened Pharaoh's heart? Are the hearts of governmental leaders still in the hand of the Lord? Is God still moving the hearts of kings? And does He continue to harden them from time to time?

No. 4: *"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law."* (Galatians 4:4) Why did Christ come into this world when He did? It is often said that two primary factors, laid in prior to Christ's advent, made way for His timely appearance.

First the Greeks, whose civilization had flourished for centuries before Christ came (800BC-146BC), had given the known world a common language. Second, by the time Christ arrived, the Romans had secured that same known world under one system of government. Roads had been built everywhere and Roman citizenship, offered to many, made travel easy. Even Paul the Apostle was a Roman citizen giving him easy access to the major cities in the region. Both the Greek language and the Roman roads and travel system, Providentially provided for prior to the Messiah's arrival, united the known world and made society much more open than it had ever been before. These provisions prepared the way for the gospel message to be spread quickly and effectively.

Speaking of Paul, he did not consider the Romans as the cause for his imprisonment. Rather, he called himself a prisoner of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 3:1, 4:1; Philemon 1:1,9,23). He believed that it was God, and not bad luck, or even bad men, that had landed him in a Roman prison. The Holy Spirit had led him to Rome. *"... and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia."* (Acts 16:6) Why, in heaven's name, would the Holy Spirit keep Paul from

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preaching the Word of God? Have you ever considered that the Holy Spirit was redirecting Paul away from the east and toward the west? Was it just to bring him to a Roman prison where he could write some of his most profound letters? Or was God Providentially guiding Paul toward Rome for other reasons as well?

Rome became the seat of western Christendom for generations. And didn't the Protestant Reformation, which took place 1500 years later, occur in Western Europe? Where are most of the free nations of this world today? Does God Providentially guide history? Is He still guiding nations and history today? Perhaps the freedom we enjoy as Americans today can, in part, be linked to the Holy Spirit's Providential resistance of Paul's attempts to take the gospel eastward.

No. 5: We have been looking at some Biblical examples of Divine Providence. But history too can help us understand. Chris Armstrong, editor of *Christian History Magazine*, says that reading history liberates us from the "tyranny of the present." With news of the war coming at us 24/7, we can easily become bogged down in a depressive quagmire that robs us of faith and hope. Reading about history helps to restore a broad sweep of perspective. Now let's look at some more recent, historical examples of Divine Providence in action.

First we'll look at Christopher Columbus. He has been trashed a lot lately, but his vision, tenacity, and fearlessness, opened up the entire western world. Did you know that he was a Christian man, a man of faith who felt a particular leading from God to launch out into the unknown western seas?

Here's what Columbus wrote to the King and Queen of Spain prior to his adventure: "At

this time I have seen and put in study to look into all the Scriptures, cosmography, histories, chronicles and philosophy and other arts, which our Lord opened to my understanding (I could sense his hand upon me), so that it became clear to me that it was feasible to navigate from here to the Indies, and he unlocked within me the determination to execute the idea. And I came to your Highnesses with this ardor."

Was God Providentially setting in motion provisions that would open up two new continents for discovery and settlement by the Christian world of that time? Was He directing "*like a watercourse*," the King and Queen of Spain to support Columbus and his vision?

Next we'll look at the Pilgrims. Did you know that their original destination had been Virginia and not Massachusetts? The weather carried them off course and they landed five-hundred miles north of where they had intended. One hundred and fifty years later, when the American War for Independence broke out, the colonies were bookended with patriots, most from Virginia and Massachusetts. Had God been Providentially guiding history toward His end?

Finally, let's look at one of our Founding Fathers. In 1755, when he was only 23 years old, George Washington was fighting with Britain's General Braddock in the battle for Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh, PA). After a major battle that just preceded the outbreak of the French-Indian War, Washington wrote home that he had had several horses shot out from under him and had found four bullet holes in his jacket. He said, "By the all powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation." Once again it appears as though God had been Providentially guiding the course of our own nation's history. Does He do any less today?

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART II: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

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GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART III: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Why are some stars brighter than others?
Why are some nations stronger than others? Is God truly Lord of all?

NO. 10: "Without a doubt a world-crisis is at hand, and everywhere men are alarmed. But God is not! He is never taken by surprise. It is no unexpected emergency which now confronts Him, for He is the One who 'worketh all things after the counsel of His own will' (Eph. 1:11)."
Arthur W. Pink

The Sovereignty of God
published in June 1918

What is sovereignty? Pink, in his book referenced above, claims that the Sovereignty of God means the "supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God...He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will."

"... dominion belongs to the LORD and he rules over the nations." (Psalm 22:28) God governs the nations, sets up kingdoms, overthrows empires, and determines the course of history as best pleases Him. Simply put, all power, all authority, all command, all mastery, all leadership, and all supremacy and sway belong to Him. Nothing is outside of the watchful eye and benevolent, managerial care of God looking over His creation.

No. 11: So then, as *"wars and rumors of wars"* abound, we can take comfort and assurance that God is in control.

"...and star differs from star in splendor." (I Corinthians 15:41b) Have you ever pondered the variety and diversity in creation? Why are some stars gargantuan and others diminutive by comparison? Why do some remain in place while others wander the sky, flaming out and disappearing forever? (Jude 13) Why did God make mighty, long-living oak trees, and at the same time, short-lived,

puny poplars? An insect called the winged mayfly often lives only a few hours while the quahog, a type of mollusk, may live over 200 years! Why are some men tall, dark, and handsome, and others short, bald, and dumpy? Could it be because that's the way God wanted things? *"The LORD does whatever pleases him..."* (Psalm 135:6a)

In the heavenly realm, what are the differences between principalities and powers? (Ephesians 3:10; 6:12; Col 1:16; 2:15; Titus 3:1) Why did God make different classes of angels—cherubim, seraphim, and archangels? Could it be because that's the way God wanted things? *"The LORD does whatever pleases him..."* (Psalm 135:6a)

Now consider these same comparisons in light of nations. Why are some nations strong and nations some weak? Why are some nations located in arid deserts and others located in fertile lands? Why do some nations have rich resources and others have scant resources? Could it be because that's the way God wanted things? *"The LORD does whatever pleases him..."* (Psalm 135:6a)

No. 12: Who controls the weather? *"I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit."* (Leviticus 26:4) God has promised that He will send us the rain we need for our crops. But later in the same chapter (v.19) He also promises that, if we disobey His commands, He might decide to dry up the rain.

Yes, God sovereignly controls the weather. He *"sits upon the flood"* (Psalm 29:10) and *"gathers the waters in His garment"* (Proverbs 30:4). He *"raises the stormy winds,"* (Psalm 107:25) and *"gathers the wind in His fists"* (Proverbs 30:4). *"I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one*

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART III: GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

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town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up." (Amos 4:7)

These are just a few of many examples in Scripture demonstrating that God is absolutely in charge of His creation. Not only did He create things the way that He desired, He is also still very much involved with all aspects, administering as pleases Him. Such knowledge brings peace and reassurance to our souls.

No. 13: *"Remember this, fix it in mind, take it to heart, you rebels. Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." (Psalm 46:8-10)*

God reminds us of the imperative of remembrance. We are admonished to revisit in our minds the ways of God from old. He has revealed the manner in which He deals with nations and kingdoms. He has declared to us His plans for the future according to His purpose. He does whatever He chooses to do.

When we consider *"wars and rumors of wars,"* we need to do so with the Sovereignty of God in mind. He is telling us in this passage, and in many others, that if we want to understand what He is going to do, we only need to look and see what He has already done. For he has revealed His purposes from the beginning to end.

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART IV: JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS

Is international strife a part of God's design?
Does God move one nation to bring His judgment upon another?

NO. 14: Have you ever considered the nations? Why do they exist? Did God have anything to do with who, where, what, and why they are? Does He have plans for them? In the next four commentaries, we will be providing a brief analysis of the theme of nations from a Biblical perspective. As "wars and rumors of wars" continue on around us, let's see what Scripture has to say. But before we look at Scripture, let's look briefly at some scholarly definitions.

According to the *Oxford-English Dictionary*, nations are: "an extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory."

John Spanier and Robert L. Wendzel in their book *Games Nations Play* offer five qualifiers for political nations:

- **SOVEREIGNTY.** The nation's right to self government within its borders without external interference.
- **GEOGRAPHIC TERRITORY.** Natural and man-made borders which separate one state from another.
- **POPULATIONS.** People who inhabit the same geographic territory and sit under the same governmental rule.
- **WORLD RECOGNITION.** Occurs when a government establishes control over its population and includes the exchange of diplomats with other nations.

- **NATIONALISM.** Difficult to define but consists of the following qualities:
 - A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY
 - A SHARED HISTORY
 - A COMMON LANGUAGE
 - THE EXPECTATION OF STAYING TOGETHER.

No. 15: Did you know that God created the nations? When He made the first two souls, His instructions were clear: "...fill the earth..." (Genesis 1:26) He reiterated those same instructions to Noah after the flood (Genesis 9:1). Shortly afterwards, the people of the earth began to collect themselves together in a place called Babel, and build a tower to the heavens. (Incidentally, scholars tell us that ancient Babel and modern-day Baghdad are geographically located very close to one another.) Anyway, God became concerned and decided to visit them. He destroyed their tower, confused their language, and scattered them. (Read Genesis 11) Why did He do this? Because His plan was for the earth to be filled with people.

But why did He confuse their languages? *"From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us."* (Acts 17:26-27; see also Deut 32:8) As we read in the last commentary, one of the characteristics of a nation is a unique language. God gave us unique languages in order to defeat the counsels and conspiracies of men against Him. *"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'"* (Psalm 2:1-3) He gave the nations different languages and set them at odds with one

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another so that we would become desperate and seek Him.

No. 16: Did you know that nations are, in many ways, like men? The Bible actually tells us this. *"Strike them with terror, O LORD ; let the nations know they are but men."* (Psalm 9:20) Like men, nations are born (Isaiah 66:8). Like men, nations can form alliances and friendships (Genesis 35:1), receive counsel (Deut. 32:28; Psalm 2:2), and rejoice (Deut. 32:23). Like men, they worship and serve gods of their own choosing (Deut. 29:18; ii Kings 17:29,33,41, 18:43, 19:12; Isaiah 36:18; Jeremiah 22:11). Nations can be afraid (Deut 2:25). They can do God's will (Jeremiah 7:28, 28:15, 27:11) and they can rebel (Ezekiel 2:3). Nations can learn (Micah 4:3). Nations can seek God (Zechariah 8:22). They have memories (Ezekiel 35:10), and they can grieve and mourn (Ezekiel 6:13-14). One nation can influence other nations--for good or for evil (Jeremiah 25:32).

Nations also have eyes (Isaiah 52:10) and ears (Micah 7:16). They can hear God's counsel (Jeremiah 31:10) as well as ungodly counsel (Psalm 2:2). They have relationships with one another (Genesis 35:11) and speak to one another (Isaiah 14:32; Jeremiah 31:10, 50:2). Like individual souls, they share ideas and philosophies. One nation can ensnare another nation (Joshua 23:13; Jeremiah 25:32). They plan, and strategize, and make decisions, and determine their courses. As autonomous units they govern themselves.

Like men, nations can have hardened hearts (Exodus 7:3) and they will, one day face judgment (Deut. 19:1, 31:3). But, unlike men, nations do not have eternal souls. Therefore, their judgment must come in this age and in this earth. How does God do this? Our next section will examine this question more fully.

No. 17: How does God view the nations? To Him they are almost as nothing. *"Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket; they are regarded as dust on the scales; he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust."* (Isaiah 40:15) God thought so little of the nations in Canaan, that He rejected them, driving them out so that Israel, His chosen nation, could take possession of the land. He also made it clear why He was driving them out. It was because He hated their manners and customs (ie: their culture). *"You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them."* (Leviticus 20:23)

God used one nation (Israel) to drive out and judge the idol-worshipping nations of Canaan. Historically, both in Scripture and from our history books, we learn how God, the Sovereign Lord of His creation, will from time to time, raise up nations to judge nations. And we also learn from the Scriptures that later, God became so angry with Israel, that He raised up another nation to bring His judgment upon them.

No. 18: God is patient and does not bring His judgment frivolously. We learned in the previous commentary that God moves to judge a nation when that nation's culture becomes abhorrent to Him. Looking again at Israel's early history, we see how Egypt's Pharaoh hardened his heart (Exodus 8:15 & 32) and how later, after several opportunities, God hardened Pharaoh's heart even more (Exodus 9:12). It is one thing for us to harden our hearts to God, but when we become so hard that God Himself relents and finishes the job, we are in big trouble.

What we don't often see from this story is that not only did Pharaoh harden his heart, but his officials hardened their hearts as well (Exodus 9:34). And later we learn that, just as with

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART IV: JUDGMENT UPON THE NATIONS

Is international strife a part of God's design?

Does God move one nation to bring His judgment upon another?

Pharaoh, God hardened their hearts too (Exodus 10:1). So here we have an entire government so hardening their hearts to God, that He joins in and helps them solidify their hardness. This is how nations set themselves up for judgment.

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART V: GOD'S AUTHORITY

What is authority?

How has God divided it among us mortals?

NO. 19: What is authority? According to the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, authority is: "Legal or rightful power; a right to command or to act; power exercised by a person in virtue of his office or trust; dominion; jurisdiction; authorization; as, the authority of a prince over subjects, and of parents over children; the authority of a court." And God possesses all of it.

Father God has temporarily given all His authority to His Son. *"The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands."* (John 3:35) *"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me."* (Matthew 28:18) One day, when Christ's kingdom building work is complete, He will return all authority back to the Father. *"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet."* (I Corinthians 15:24-25; see also Psalm 110:1; Luke 20:43)

Even as Christ the Son is in temporary possession of all authority (noted in Matt. 28:18 above), He dispensed or delegated His authority to His disciples: *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."* (Matthew 28:19-20) The primary function of the authority delegated by Jesus to His disciples as noted in this passage is for the furtherance of the gospel and the ministry of the Church. But there are other types of authority that God has also parceled out to us. In our upcoming commentaries, we will look at them.

No. 20: In Matthew 28:18-20, we learn that Jesus received all authority from the Father

and that He commissioned the Church to go and teach the nations about Him and His kingdom. In delegating His authority to His disciples, Jesus in essence, established His Church in the earth. Prior to this moment however, mankind had already received a measure of God's authority. In Genesis 1:26 and 1:28, we read of God's purpose and instructions for Adam. After declaring that He was about to make man in His image, God said, *"... and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."* (Genesis 1:26).

Furthermore, after He had made Adam, He spoke to Adam with these instructions: *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."* (Genesis 1:28)

At creation, God imparted a measure of His authority to Adam for the administration of the earth. And, as we examine the whole of Scripture, or as some call it, the "whole counsel of God," we learn that this additional authority had been parceled out specifically in two areas: The Family and Civil Government. So then, there are now three areas where God has imparted His authority: Family, Civil Government, and the Church. These are the three Divinely established institutions where men share, just a little bit, in God's authority.

No. 21: In addition to the institution of the Church, God created two other institutions and imparted His authority for limited administration.

- **The Institution of the Family:** *"... male and female he created them."* (Genesis 1:27) The family that God created looks like this - husband/father, wife/mother, and as

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART V: GOD'S AUTHORITY

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God wills, children. Other configurations are an aberration. *"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right."* (Ephesians 6:1) A parent need not be a Christian or Jew to exercise authority over their children. God instituted the family and delegated His authority to **all** parents to exercise over their children for the purpose of raising them and preparing them for adulthood. Families are the basic building block of societies, cultures, and nations.

- **The Institution of Civil Government:** *"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone--for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."* (I Timothy 2:1-2) *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God."* (Romans 13:1) God has established all civil authority. Those holding positions of leadership are *"... God's servants, who give their full time to governing."* (Romans 13:6) Even as parents with children in families possess God's authority, so leaders who administrate our civil government also possess God's authority.

No. 22: We have discussed how God created three institutions: The Church, the Family, and the Civil Government. In this section and the next, we will briefly discuss how God's authority works in Civil Government.

All of creation operates by governing laws and principles. We only have time to mention a couple here. But God is indeed a God of order. Look at the universe. Planets are held in their place, orbiting the sun, by gravity and the speed at which they travel

through space. The earth's orbit around the sun creates our seasons, while its 24-hour axis rotation produces our days and nights and everything in between. The ocean's tides are regulated by the moon. Countless examples could be put forth to demonstrate the essentiality of government in creation.

Is it then any surprise to learn that Civil Government is not in place by default, but rather by the plans of Almighty God? There are many reasons that God established Civil Government. One of them is to enable justice to be meted out in light of the sinful condition of the human race in our corrupted world. We first learn of this purpose shortly after Noah's 40-day adventure when God declared: *"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man."* (Genesis 9:6) Our next commentary will look more closely at this purpose for Civil Government.

No. 23: As noted in the last commentary, one of the reasons that Civil Government exists is to mete out justice. Consider Paul's comments in Romans: *"Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's ser-*

GOD AND THE NATIONS

PART V: GOD'S AUTHORITY

What is authority?

How has God divided it among us mortals?

vants, who give their full time to governing." (Romans 13:1-6)

Note also, Paul's reference to the sword. The Church does not bear the sword. Neither does the Family. Only the Civil Government bears the sword. In fact, bearing the sword is one of the God-given responsibilities of the Civil Government. Many Christians believe that Christ's teaching on "turning the other cheek" applies to pacifism and non-resistance when attacked in war. But look at all the warriors God anointed to conduct war. Furthermore, the New Testament lauds these Old Testament warriors for their acts of faith in war. *"And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies." (Hebrews 11:32-35).* Never did Jesus, although given the opportunity to do so, ever instruct a military convert to resign from his line of work or stop making war (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 3:14).

GOD AND THE NATIONS

SUMMARY AND FINAL THOUGHTS

The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord.

SUMMARY: *"In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia ..."* (2 Chronicles 36:22) Friends, history is not random or haphazard. It is God, both Sovereign and Providential, who moves upon the leaders of nations to carry out His will. *"The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD ; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases."* (Proverbs 21:1) Was the king's heart in the hand of the Lord when He raised up Assyria's king to bring judgment upon Israel? (2 Kings 17:6) Was the king's heart in the hand of the Lord when He hardened the heart of Egypt's Pharaoh? (Exodus 9:12)

Jesus said that we would hear of *"wars and rumors of wars."* He also said that such things "must" happen. (Matthew 24:6; Mark 13:7) God does not panic or go to pieces when wars break out. He is the Lord of history, or as many have said, His story. He is the One who raises up nations and kingdoms, and when needed, brings them to judgment.

Watching war unfold on television can not only become intoxicating, it can also blind us to the big picture.

Final Thoughts

Thank you for your patience in reading this material. I trust it has ministered to you. Thank you for your patience in reading this material I hope it has ministered to you. I would like to conclude the series with a few thoughts on Freedom and Authority.

Freedom exists as the core political concept in our nation. The Bill of Rights includes the freedom of speech, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom to worship without interference from the government. What we often fail to recognize is from whence this precious

gift of freedom originates.

Freedom does not originate from our Constitution. Our Constitution only guarantees it. Freedom, as our Founders understood it, originates in God. Yes, God gives it. And, if we fail to use it properly, God can take it away.

The same can be said of authority. As we have learned, nations exist at the pleasure of God. Civil or governmental authority also exists at the pleasure of God. Our forefathers fought for political freedom because they believed that the widely held view of the time, known as "the divine right of kings," existed as a falsehood. The "American Revolution," or "War for Independence" as some call it, occurred in a Providentially inspired crucible and at the "fullness of time."

Political or civil authority can come about in two ways: 1) it can be assumed through brute force or manipulation, or 2) it can be granted freely by those who are governed.

Either way, it appears from both Scripture and the testimony of history, that God acknowledges and works within the confines of whatever civil authority exists within a given nation—at least for a period of time. The fact that nations rise and fall and that governments come and go, instruct us that God is indeed the One who grants authority. For He can take it away as easily as He can give it. No king, no governor, and certainly no government, can abuse their authority and escape God's watchful eye. And this is primarily why, until Christ comes again, we will continue to hear about *"wars and rumors of wars."*

God and the Nations

God's Providence
God's Judgment
God's Sovereign Rule

*"Why do the nations conspire
and the peoples plot in vain?"*

Psalm 2:1 NIV

We live in troubled times. We are bombarded daily with information on wars and rumors of wars. Where can we find comfort and assurance that God remains in control?

The ancient men of Isaachar understood their times and knew what needed to be done. (I Chronicles 12:32) By searching the Scriptures, we too can gain wisdom and understanding. Does God guide history? How does He make provision for His future plans? What is Providence? Why do nations exist? Why are some nations stronger than others? Is God truly Lord of all? Is international strife part of God's design? Does God move one nation to bring His judgment upon another?

*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD ;
he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.*

Proverbs 21:1 NIV

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