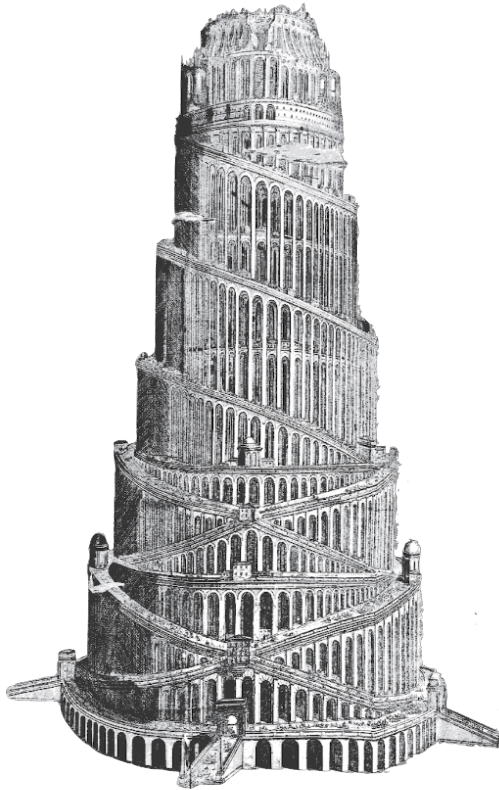


What the Bible Says  
about  
**NATIONAL BORDERS**



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FRONTISPIECE: An illustration of the tower of Babel, derived from “Turris Babel” (1679) by Lieven Cruyl (1634-1720) and Coenraet Decker (1650-1685). Clip-art adaptation from an unknown source.

## **BORDER WALLS**

**REFUGEES      MIGRANTS      PROTESTS      RIOTS**

## **CITIES IN FLAMES**

If you've had your eyes and ears open these past few years, you've seen and heard about all of these things. Borders, immigration, and racial tensions are points of major debate. The conflict is palpable, and every public figure is expected to take a side. But it won't stop there. In the end, the moment of truth will come for each and every one of us. We will all be made to choose sides. The time for sitting on the fence is over.

But what are the sides from which we must choose? And how will we decide between them? Will we let ourselves be guided by social pressure and sentiment? Or will we take the side of truth, reason, and righteousness?

On one side, we've heard that our countries must be open to all people, and that every effort should be made toward equality. Some say there should be no borders at all. There are Christian leaders who tell us that "there is neither Jew nor Greek", and therefore we should welcome everyone into our country and put them on an equal footing to ourselves.

On the other side, many people are unhappy with these ideas. They point out that societies become more and more unfriendly and unsafe as the number of foreigners increases. They want their children to grow up in the country they remember, and they fear it is fast becoming unrecognizable.

Are these concerns well-founded, or is there a hidden hatred at play? Is equality a worthy goal, or should we keep our nations distinct? Turn the page, and let's decide.

## **BORDERS AND THE BIBLE**

We will not be able to understand what is going on in our world if we don't know what the debate is actually about. When it comes to national borders, most of us take them for granted. But do we really know what they are and why we have them?

In simple terms, a border is just a mark that divides one person's property from another's. If you look closely in the corner of your yard, you might find a little metal marker sticking in the ground. This shows where your lawn ends and your neighbour's begins. Some people have a fence to mark their property. If you have small children, a fence is very helpful to keep them from wandering off. It can also block stray animals or criminals who might harm your family.

Your country's border is much the same. It divides the land that belongs to one people group from the land of other peoples. Usually, there are border guards to keep tabs on who is visiting and to screen out vagrants and others who might pose a threat.

Some people don't like this; they say that all people should be free to go wherever they wish because borders are arbitrary. They say it is wrong to be fearful of foreigners, that the dangers are imaginary.

But ask yourself: is it wrong for you to have a fence around your yard? Do you let every passer-by enter your home and play with your children? These are not difficult questions. You are cautious, because you know you are responsible for your family's well-being. Just so, we must be careful about whom we allow entrance to our country.

This is only common sense. But what does the Bible have to say? Is there anything we can learn about national borders from Holy Scripture? As it turns out, the Bible has quite a lot to say about borders, about why they exist, and about what this means for us.

The book of Proverbs contains wisdom of a practical nature, and it teaches us to conform our lives to the moral order of the world. There we find the following warning: "Do not move an ancient boundary stone set up by your ancestors." (Prov. 22:28) We noted earlier that a boundary marker indicates a border; it divides one property from another. This border might be a family border, or it might belong to a whole tribe or nation. From this proverb, our main takeaway is that boundaries impose an inter-generational obligation. Our forebears established a claim to a particular land with the intention of passing it on to succeeding generations, and according to scripture there is a duty not to overturn that arrangement.

You might recall the story of Naboth's vineyard in 1 Kings 21. King Ahab, who was an evil man, desired to have this vineyard for himself, and he offered Naboth a trade. Naboth's response should make us think. He said, "The LORD forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my ancestors." Naboth had a special

attachment to his land, and that attachment was moral. He believed that selling it to the king would be against God's will.

In our day and age, we are not accustomed to thinking this way. Most of us live in cities, and we move from house to house as the need arises. There is not necessarily anything wrong with this. Cities in ancient Israel were much the same. But the countryside was divided up between the tribes, and the land of the tribes was divided up among the clans, all the way down to smaller family groups. The Lord made this arrangement for them when they settled Canaan, and He instructed that "no inheritance shall be transferred from one tribe to another, for each of the tribes of the people of Israel shall hold on to its own inheritance." (Num. 36:9)

Throughout most of human history, family land holdings were very important. In recent years, however, this is something we've lost. For most of us, family farms and other landholdings are a thing of the distant past, and more and more of our countries are controlled by wealthy and powerful interests. The prophet Isaiah spoke against this state of affairs when he said, "Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land." (Isa. 5:8)

Our loss of family inheritance and family identity is tragic, but even worse, there are some who would like this process to continue even further. They want a world without any borders at all – and without any nations. But nations are like families in many ways, and in the Bible they are called "the families of the earth." (Zech. 14:17; Acts 3:25) Like families, nations have lands that are passed on from one generation to another. This was part of God's design. In Deuteronomy 32:8, Moses said, "when the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when He divided mankind, He fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God." In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul repeated this point when he told the

Athenians, “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.” (Acts 17:26)

If it was God’s plan for mankind to be separated into different countries and nationalities, then we must be wary of those who promote a world without borders. We should recall the words of our Lord when He said, “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” (Mark 10:9) It is a dangerous thing to go against the order established by God, and when it comes to our nations, we should pause before daring to combine what God has put asunder. When the tower of Babel was built, the people refused to disperse, and so God forced the nations to separate by confusing their language.

Now, we should avoid taking this too far. It does not mean we must be enemies to other nations, just as having a fence around your yard doesn’t turn your neighbours into enemies. It’s simply a matter of preserving what we’ve received from the Lord. We must act as good stewards of all God’s gifts. Generosity is part of this, but we must keep in mind that a steward is a *manager*, and such a position comes with a set of responsibilities. To erase our borders and give our country to foreigners would be an abdication of those responsibilities. This used to be called treason, and it goes against the fifth commandment. “Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.” (Exod. 20:12) There is a connection between the honour we owe our to forefathers and the land they bequeath to us. If we wish to keep our country and prosper in it, we must honour our fathers and mothers by respecting the ancient landmarks of our people.

But there are many who reject this teaching, and often they will quote the words of Paul: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28) They argue that because the



Apostle Paul says that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile, Christians must support the erasure of national borders and distinct nations. But this is a mistake. To be one with each other in Christ is something spiritual, not physical or political. This is an important distinction. No one is privileged before God simply for being male or female, or for being Jewish, but these differences are natural, and they remain important for everyday life. “In the resurrection,” Jesus tells us, “they neither marry nor are they given in marriage.” (Matt. 22:30) But in our present earthly life, we know that marriage remains, and so too must male and female. The same can be said of nationality.

Remember also, that when the Apostle speaks of the one body of Christ, it is, like every other body, one with very distinct parts, all with a different place and function. For he says, “If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell?” (1 Cor. 12:17) So even though, as he says, there is neither male nor female, Paul tells us that women must obey their husbands (Eph. 5:22) and are not allowed to teach in the churches (1. Tim. 2:12). “But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as He chose.” (1 Cor. 12:18) Such an arrangement, coming from God, is not to be set aside.

When it comes to nations and borders, we must understand this arrangement as originating with the Lord. Of course, we know that throughout history borders have changed many times, and large nations have moved from one place to another, often conquering or displacing other people groups. But this also comes from God’s providence. He not only appointed the boundaries of the nations, but also their “times”, as Paul says in Acts 17. So at the time of His choosing, God called the ancient Israelites to conquer and destroy the people of Canaan. From the Bible, we know of two reasons for this. First, He promised the land as an inheritance to Abraham for his descendants. But God did not give it to him immediately, “for,” He said, “the iniquity

of the Amorites is not yet full.” (Gen. 15:16) This gives us the second reason for the conquest of Canaan. Because of the corruption of the people of that land, God allowed them to be conquered by the Israelites. Likewise, when Israel itself was corrupted, God allowed them to be conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. To avoid being misunderstood, I do not mean to imply that national conquest is always justified. The motivations for such actions are often doubtful at best, and many conquerors have been power-hungry and bloodthirsty men. But we cannot make a blanket statement, and it remains true that every change of national fortune, whether just or unjust from our perspective, comes from the hand of God.

But because of all the war and conflict between nations, some people claim that we should do away with borders altogether, and that a unified world would be more peaceful. But such a proposal ignores the warning of Babel. Just before God divided the nations, He said:

Behold, the people are one, and they all speak one language. This is what they begin to do, and nothing that they imagine to do will now be impossible for them. (Gen. 11:6)

God divided us into nations to limit the scope of human power, to restrain our ambitions, and to define our duties. War and disorder come not from boundaries, but from those who violate them. For all the talk about unity and peace, we know that a man-centred world government is a framework for tyranny. The division of sovereignty between nations affords protection against men who strive for absolute power. Only God has the right to worldwide dominion, and He divides and delegates that authority according to His own choice.

Over the ages, God has chosen different men at different times. One nation falls, another rises to take its place. But in the end,

He appointed one man to unite all power in Himself: the Lord Jesus Christ. The word *Christ* is a title given to the one chosen by God. It means “anointed one”. This is because, in ancient times, kings were anointed with oil to symbolize God’s power and commission. And so Jesus, as the King of kings, is called Christ in recognition that God the Father has chosen Him to rule over all nations. The prophet David foretold the reign of Jesus in in the book of Psalms. He wrote these salient words in Psalm 2:

“I have installed My King on Zion,  
upon My holy mountain.” (v. 6)

Therefore be wise, O kings;  
be admonished, O judges of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
and rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry  
and you perish in your rebellion.  
when His wrath is kindled quickly.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him. (vv. 10-12)

But the Kingdom of Christ is not a kingdom where borders are abolished. On the contrary, the Bible foretells a world where each people retains its own rights in service to God. The difference between then and now is not that there will be no borders and no nations, but that each nation will be established in its own rights without threat of war:

And He will judge between many peoples, and will settle disputes for strong and distant nations; and they will beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up the sword against nation, and never again will they learn war. But everyone will sit under his own vine, and under his own fig tree, and none shall make them afraid. (Mic. 4:3-4; cf. Isa. 2:4)

This prophecy offers hope for all nations, and especially for those who endure persecution for righteousness' sake. More than that, it offers hope even for those who bring disaster on themselves through their own foolishness. One of the laws God gave His people in the Old Testament offered the hope of restoration for those who had been dispossessed of their land and separated from their people. Back then, it was not uncommon for the poor to sell themselves as slaves in order to pay off debts. It also happened that many people lost their ancestral property, their family farms, to foreclosure or other hardships. But in His law, God commanded that every seventh year, debts were to be forgiven and slaves set free (Deut. 15). And in the fiftieth year, all ancestral lands and family farms were to be returned to their rightful living heirs, and every man to his own clan (Lev. 25:10).

These laws were meant to promote fairness and economic balance in the nation, and to prevent the concentration of power by wealthy elites and moneylenders. But more than that, they served as powerful symbols of future hope: an even greater time when not only debts, but even sins would be forgiven, and men would be released not only from economic slavery, but also from slavery to corruption. Disease and death would give way to perfect health and freedom. When Jesus began to preach, He used this framework and these words to describe His mission:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,  
For He anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
And recovery of sight to the blind,  
To set at liberty those who are oppressed;  
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.  
(Luke 4:18-19)

The hardships mentioned here – blindness, captivity, oppression – which Jesus promised to end, are evidence of the great debt

we owe to God on account of our sin. The signs and miracles of Jesus pointed to the release of this debt. He healed the sick as proof of His power to forgive. But the religious leaders of the time hated this. They had been taking advantage of the poor to enrich themselves, and they used religion to disguise their greed. To their thinking, Jesus was an upstart and had no right to forgive sins. He responded to their challenge with a miracle:

“But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins” – then He said to the paralyzed man, “Arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.” (Matt. 9:6)

This was the beginning of God’s kingdom. The year of the Lord’s favour was meant to usher in a time of restoration for the whole nation. But the Jews rejected His message and refused to accept Him as their King. As a result, their nation never got to experience the return to freedom. Jesus had warned them, “The kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it.” (Matt. 21:43) In the end, the rebellious Jews were put down and defeated by the Romans, who dispossessed them of their homeland and razed Jerusalem to the ground.

This ought to teach us an important lesson: The consequences of sin extend to the whole nation. The Bible says, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a people’s disgrace.” (Prov. 14:34) The example of the Jews shows us that, if a nation hopes for freedom and prosperity, then religion is a public concern. Jesus, as King of kings, requires obedience not only in private life, but from the nation as a whole. Its leaders must embody justice with good laws and conduct themselves accordingly. This is an unpopular truth; many people today prefer to keep religion out of public life. But Jesus made it crystal clear in His parting words. Just before He ascended into heaven to be enthroned at the right hand of God the Father,

Jesus said to His disciples:

All authority is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. (Matt. 28:18-20)

Their mission was to preach more than just the forgiveness of sins; they were to proclaim His authority and teach His commandments to the nations. The final outcome of this mission will be the recognition of Jesus as the universal King. “Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him.” (Ps. 72:11)

Thus the Bible does hold up an ideal of world government, but the vision is very different from the one imagined by men. Jesus' empire does not abolish the nations, but reconstitutes them in obedience to Himself. Those who refuse Him will be destroyed, but to those who obey, He offers freedom and health: “the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:2)

Now we have reviewed the past and looked ahead to the future. It is time to consider the present: what does all this mean for us today? In an age of war and mass migration, what should be our attitude toward the nations into which we have been born, and how should we guide our conduct? Consider these words of the Apostle Paul:

But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches. (1 Cor. 7:17)

The Apostle instructs us to live according to what God has distributed to us. This means there is no single path that will be right for everyone. But it's not a free-for-all either. Just as

everyone has his own gifts, so everyone also has his own duties and responsibilities. In order to know what those responsibilities are, we have to think in terms of our own particular place in the world. Often this will mean putting aside our ideal life to do what God requires of us. So, for example, every man must love his *own* wife, even if she isn't the prettiest. Every child must honour his *own* parents, even if they aren't the wisest. And all of us must consider the welfare of our own people, even if they aren't perfect. As Christians, it is important that we do right by the people among whom God has placed us. And this means we must have a proper respect toward maintaining our borders and the integrity of our nations.

Ignoring this principle comes at a cost. If a man were to say that he loves all women equally to his own wife, that woman would have our sympathy. If he were to say that he loves all children equally to his own, we would pity his children. Such a man would be rightly regarded as a hypocrite. If he were to live out his words, we would not discover in him any great love for the women and children of the world. On the contrary, it would be an unpardonable neglect and betrayal of his own family. This is exactly what we see today in our rulers and politicians: they pretend to make no distinction between one nation and another, to put no difference between immigrant and native. But all the while they favour foreigners at the expense of their own countrymen.

The end of such hypocrisy is a price paid in blood. In recent years, many millions of foreigners have crowded into Western nations. Violence and racial tensions are on the rise. The number of victims gets larger every day, and the grievances are endless.

Even with so much strife on every side, there are still many who desire peace. James, the brother of our Lord, tells us that peace is the part of heavenly wisdom, and that "a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."

(James 3:18) By contrast, he also tells us of another type of wisdom: an evil, demonic wisdom, such that “where envy and selfish ambition are, there will be disorder and every evil practice.” (James 3:16) It should be obvious which type of wisdom is at work in our nations today.

But what does heavenly wisdom look like when we already have such a mess on our hands? Is there still a path to peace, and does Holy Scripture give us guidance? The answer is yes, if we have eyes to see. The example of Abraham, father of the faithful, points us in the right direction:

Then Abram said to Lot, “Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen, for we are kinsmen. Is not the whole land before you? Separate yourself from me. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right, or if you take the right hand, then I will go to the left.” (Gen. 13:8-9)

We have often been told that wanting to live separately from other nations is a sign of hatred. But this is not true. Abraham and Lot cared for each other, but they recognized that in their situation, the best way to remain friends was peaceful separation.

The Bible tells us that “a man shall leave his father and mother, and be united to his wife.” (Gen. 2:24) When a man and a woman get married, they live separately from their parents. This does not come from hatred. No, we recognize that the new family will need their own space, so that they will be free to develop in their own unique way.

The same is true of nations. The peoples of the world are unique, and in order to develop freely they must have a measure of independence. Forcing them all to live together takes away



that independence, and it robs them of the opportunity to express their own genius in a positive way. The result is violence, strife, and disorder.

It is time we recognized that those in power who insist on the erasure of national borders are not motivated by love. They do not display that peaceable wisdom of heaven. The disorder we see all around us is the work of envy and selfish ambition. This kind of wisdom “does not descend from above, but is earthly, beastly, demonic” (James 3:15). If peace is what we truly desire, we must heed these words of James and follow the example of Abraham.

May God save our nations, and may they walk by the light of His heavenly city.



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