

What is a Nation and Why Does it Matter?

00:00:00:06 - 00:00:26:14

Alex Kocman

The same thing happens when we hear so many politicians and people in media say, America is an idea. Well, it's an idea. Well, in some sense that's true. America has tons of unique ideas. But, in the most technical sense, America, of course, is more than an idea. After all, you have people who are Americans who live here, who are naturalized or natural born citizens who disagree with those ideas.

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Alex Kocman

Right. But they're still Americans. So clearly, being American is not just an idea. Right? That's but there is this agenda of saying like, well, let's have just a completely open society and let's sort of blend everyone into this homogenized global soup.

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Alex Kocman

Greetings and welcome to the Missions Podcast, this show that explores your hard questions on missions, theology, and practice to help goers think and thinkers go. I'm Alex Kocman, Director of Communications and Engagement with ABWE. We are joined yet again by Scott Dunford, the one and only pastor of Western Hills Church in San Mateo, California. Whether you're listening to us on your favorite podcast platform or in the wrath and Grace app, or on NRB-TV or the ABWE website or YouTube channel, yeah, there's a lot of places you can get this show.

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Alex Kocman

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00:01:41:13 - 00:01:58:14

Alex Kocman

You know this isn't a show. Hate to say it, but we don't have a lot in terms of mass appeal. We're talking about mission. You know, the idea of going, which is hard, which is sacrificial, and we're talking about doing so through a pretty narrow biblical lens of saying there's a right way to do things biblically. And you know what?

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Alex Kocman

That does leave out a lot of the masses for maybe being as interested in this content. And yet we thank each and every one of you who's chosen to do that. And we're always encouraged by those of us, those of you, rather, who've shared how the show has been a blessing to you, especially those of you guys who are a part of our premium club.

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Alex Kocman

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Alex Kocman

For a donation of \$9.99 per month to the Missions podcast, which is a ministry of ABWE. So listeners, thank you. We're so glad to be on this journey with you, Scott. We've been doing

this for I don't know, we've been doing this since 2017. We're over 450 episodes in. I've lost count, and you and I have been through a lot together.

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Alex Kocman

Brother. We've both learned a lot and the Lord has blessed it. And you know, we're continuing to sharpen each other, to refine each other. That's one of the things I appreciate most about what we get to do here. And I think we can even do a little bit of that today. Right.

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Scott Dunford

Well, we're going to try. I mean, I don't know, we've been talking a lot about I mean, that we but you know, all over social media, there's a lot of discussions that are happening. Some we're talking, some worth not worth talking. I know you've been interested in this idea of what is a nation, and especially as it relates to America and the idea of is America, idea, or is it something else?

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Scott Dunford

And, I think as it relates to missions, I think that's a good discussion to kind of dive into it, our nation static. And how should we think about nations? Because that is, just going on that a little bit deeper. That's been a tension within mission, Miss Theology, for a long time. Do we go to nations, meaning geopolitical units with fixed boundaries, or do we go to people groups or as, some of our friends like to talk about, language groups, which I do think makes more sense?

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Scott Dunford

Yeah. Or is it some combination of both. And so I think diving into that a little bit deeper, obviously you've done more thinking and writing on the topic than I have, but it certainly I think would be a good thing to hash out here.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah. Scott, maybe if you could help set the table for us, what would you say have been kind of the major schools of thought, maybe just within missions. So walk out for us again for any new listeners as well. How do geologists typically define a people group? You know, we throw that term around. Maybe your church prays for a people group of the week, right?

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Alex Kocman

Our church has that, I think, printed on our bulletin. Define people group maybe distinguish what do we mean when we say language group instead of that? All of that is backdrop of course, we've talked about this on the show before, and we can include links in the show notes as well. We've had this conversation with our friend Michelle, and in a couple of different other settings as well.

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Alex Kocman

We've talked about our and how do we define unreached people groups, which is its own thing. But maybe could you just give us some orientation of those categories before we dive in?

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Scott Dunford

The discussion within geology obviously goes back to what does it mean when Jesus tells, the disciples and sends them out to every, every nation, ethnic right. And so that a lot of

discussion has been around what is, you know, Pontotoc, what are what are the nations that we're supposed to go to, or what are the ethnicities or the people groups?

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Scott Dunford

Then you also have like revelation five, revelation seven, where it talks about the throne room of heaven and this great multitude of, of witnesses from every tribe, tongue, people and nation. And so there's a lot of discussion and thinking around that. And then also the way that Paul, some say, and I think it's pretty interesting to think about that.

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Scott Dunford

Paul is kind of retracing, the table of nations as he's progressing in the Great Commission proclamation. And so there's those, those big, you know, discussions. And then you fast forward to modern, missions movement, with William Kerry and his famous inquiry, in which.

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Alex Kocman

He does.

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Scott Dunford

Really what we would say is like the first modern theological, treaties where he's really examining people, groups and, and languages that not do not yet have the gospel. And, laying that out as far as who needs to be reached. And then, of course, gets picked up later, by, Ralph Winters and Donald Gavron and others out of, Fuller, and the US center for global, center for US, center for Global Missions and, and starting to define hey, there are people groups that have had the gospel saturated or even people groups that have had lots of evangelical witness that have the Bible in their language, that have had

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Scott Dunford

churches established. And even though maybe those churches aren't faithful, or aren't even evangelical, they do have an opportunity for people to hear the gospel and be saved, whereas billions of people are outside of the reach of the gospel, period. And so there's been an effort to identify who are those unreached people groups that do not yet have the gospel.

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Scott Dunford

And if from what I understand, when people talk about this, they're basically saying what? When they're defining a people group, they're saying, what is this, this linguistic ethno linguistic group in which the gospel could flourish within it without having to have someone, until it reaches a barrier where someone has to cross a language or cultural barrier to reach someone else with the gospel.

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Alex Kocman

So what's that base level of continuity that, that like what is a group?

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Scott Dunford

Right. So hearing it here in California, you know, I have a lot more in common with, for instance, my friend who's, American born Chinese, whose family have been here in America from since the 1800s. We share lots of things in common. We talk about football, we talk about baseball. But, you know, we can talk about almost anything.

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Scott Dunford

And we have those things in common. Even though he was born in San Francisco, I was born in Wisconsin. But maybe, you know, Laotian immigrant from Wisconsin that that that speaks Lao I have less in common with even though we were born in the same state. So that kind of thinking kind of comes into how do we reach people, groups that are that are separated from us by some kind of a barrier that has to be reached, has to be crossed.

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Alex Kocman

And that's helpful framing for things. What's interesting to me every time we talk about this is, I think, the first deep dive that we did Scott, into who or what is a nation was in 2020 when together for the gospel was canceled because of the pandemic. And so we had what was going to be a separate event, a panel.

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Alex Kocman

We did that as a as a virtual panel. And we had all of our friends, all of the heavy hitters. Brooke Spitzer, Matt Bennett was a part of that. Our own Paul Davis, and several other people a lot smarter than me and maybe even 1 or 2 a little smarter than, you know, fans, brother. But we had a just a wonderful cast of characters diving in, diving into that question, of what is a people group?

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Alex Kocman

What is a nation? So this has been something that the. Yeah, the nuances of that have kind of been debated within missions for years because it affects strategy, not just, you know, how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. But if I understand nations, for instance, to be the exact same thing as a nation state, right?

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Alex Kocman

So the United States, that's one singular nation, period. Full stop. Well, you know, if then, then there's only, you know, just shy of what? How many nations are we talking about? 200. Some, nations in the world. If every single geopolitical country has a missionary presence, then then the job is done with the Great Commission, right? So unless and this was the point that winter and others made, unless nations are something separate from the state, unless nations are the people groups that exist within those, polities.

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Alex Kocman

Well, then the Great Commission is something else. It's not just about getting boots on the ground in every country, the way we think of it as moderns, rather of the missionary task, is making sure that each distinct people group is reach. So we've kind of had that understanding that's been in our conversations, but only within the last year or so as this deeper question of what is a nation really, I think, exploded onto the political scene.

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Alex Kocman

And there's a lot of reasons for that that we could get into or maybe not get into, depending where the conversation goes. But for me, Scott, it's interesting. I do think that, there is a problem with this other competing definition of nation, the one that we kind of throw around casually, and it's one of those things I know what people mean by it, okay?

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Alex Kocman

Just like when somebody says, our friend Fatberg Mire, that if you're listening, hey, buddy, we love you. But when friends like Thad say, every Christian is a missionary, or when Charles Spurgeon says every Christian is a missionary or an imposter. I know what you mean, and I can affirm what you mean, but I actually want to quibble with the actual statement of fact.

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Alex Kocman

I don't think it's that simplistic. The same thing happens when we hear so many politicians and people in media and education say, America is an idea. Well, it's an idea. Well, in some sense that's true. America has tons of unique ideas about freedom and hard work and all the sorts of things that kind of make up that American ethos, that are really unique and make us a really special place.

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Alex Kocman

And I really don't want to live anywhere else. I love my country. But, in the most technical sense, America, of course, is more than an idea. After all, you have people who are Americans who live here, who are naturalized or are natural born citizens who disagree with those ideas. Right. But they're still Americans. So clearly, being American is not just an idea.

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Alex Kocman

Right? That's something that we throw around. And I think, again, I think a lot of us throw that around innocently. I do think that maybe some people throw that around. Not so innocently. I do think there's this agenda, going all the way back to guys like Karl Popper. But there is this agenda of saying like, well, let's have just a completely open society and let's sort of wear away at the distinctions between people groups and between countries and national identities and cultures and religions.

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Alex Kocman

And let's sort of blend everyone into this homogenized global soup, because then the technology of mass governance, can better really control those masses. I think that's a real thing. I think you can look in Scripture and see things like, yeah, you know, the Tower of

Babel is an instance of that. There's this consolidating openness impulse that I think is in the enemy's playbook.

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Alex Kocman

And when I look in Scripture, I see something else. I see on the one hand. Yeah. And Christ, there's no Jew were Greek. Right. Those national distinctions, for instance, they don't matter at the foot of the cross. But you also see, as you mentioned, Scott. Right. Revelation five nine and seven nine, the distinctness of every nation, tribe and culture endure into the eschaton.

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Alex Kocman

So where does that leave us? Well, I think it's interesting that the political conversation we're having has the same answer as the theological conversation that we've been having for years. I would say, and I think a lot of our friends would, would answer similarly. And you can share your thoughts, God. But if somebody asked me to define a nation, I would say, well, it's not one thing.

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Alex Kocman

It's not just, ethnicity or nationality. It's not just language. It's not just culture or religion. It's not just what borders you live within. It's a it's a constellation of all of those things, which is how a lot of our physiologists friends would define nation as well. It's a it's a combination of ethnicity linguistic. Right. Because ethno linguistic but also self-conception also religion tradition, heritage land is a part of it.

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Alex Kocman

It all has to do with do they have a concept of themselves as a unified whole, even if they're dispersed because there's diaspora people groups as well. But do they have a concept of themselves as a cohesive whole, regardless of what government they're under or if they are self-governed? So all of that goes into saying, I think we need to hold to, the, the nuances of that definition.

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Alex Kocman

It is a combination of these things. And when we become very loose about defining what a nation is, you know, certainly at the political level, that leads to kind of a, you know, open borders is kind of where that goes politically. But I think I think spiritually and I think in our churches as well, there's a there's a different danger.

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Alex Kocman

And I think that leads directly to something that I know you and I have both counseled people through. You'll preach on missions, you'll preach on the imperatives of the Great Commission, reaching everyone with the gospel and so forth, and someone will come and say, well, what's the difference between, you know, lost people here in lost people there?

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Alex Kocman

I can reach my neighbor across the street the same way that, you can reach, you know, somebody on the other side of the world. What difference does it make? And I think to be faithful to Scripture, we have to recognize it's not just about saving individuals. It's about all of the distinct nations. As such, worshiping Christ and being disciplined and coming into the kingdom of Christ, which means, in the missionary role.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah, we need to still send missionaries to faraway people groups without access to the gospel. It's not just about evangelism everywhere. It's specifically about making sure that every people or language is reached with the gospel, and that there's a healthy, self-sustaining church in each of those places. I have a lot more that I could say, but I'd love for you to cut in and comment on that.

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Alex Kocman

How would you define nationhood if you would define it any differently? And then what do you see as the effects downstream of this conversation? Hey listeners, we know you believe in missions, otherwise you probably wouldn't be listening to or watching this show, but have you ever wondered what your next step with the Great Commission should be? Maybe the Lord is leading you to serve somewhere yourself.

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Alex Kocman

Maybe the Lord is calling you to be a part of sending someone from out of your own church. Well, wherever you are with missions, if you're ready to get serious and find what your next step is, a 24 hour demo event is for you. Now. It's great to listen to a podcast about missions, but there's nothing that beats the in-person fellowship that can only take place face to face, where you're alongside other people that are in your similar station of life, thinking and praying together about your next steps.

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Alex Kocman

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Alex Kocman

Now back to the show.

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Scott Dunford

Yeah, I don't know that I'm prepared to, to get into a definition of nationhood, but I would say, I did like that you nuance, because I haven't heard a lot of nuance on social media that.

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Alex Kocman

Many such cases.

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Scott Dunford

Yeah. But I mean, I mean, the point is that it isn't it isn't just an idea, but an idea is part of what America is, for sure. You know? I mean, America does because America doesn't have these long histories of thousand years on the land. There is an idea that brings us together. And that idea, that idea does change over time, you know?

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Scott Dunford

I mean, if you read the original documents in the Constitution, it was mostly focused on white people. And then over time realizing, hey, you know, we need to recognize the fact that we brought all these other peoples over here, that we are also part of this nation. So it is an idea, not just an idea, though, where I think I would maybe disagree with you, or you can maybe nuance this a little more, is that I do think that something, something unique happens.

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Scott Dunford

And I do think there is a, a globalization type of globalization push within the Great Commission, in that we are coming from nations to become a new nation in Christ. So in acts, I think Pentecost is it is a reversal of sorts of Babel. It's a bringing together what was separated, at Babel. I also think that even in revelation five, it's not that the I don't think those distinct nations necessarily emerge and continue on into eternity, but I do think you have some from every tribe, tongue, people and nation.

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Scott Dunford

I don't want to overemphasize that from part, because I don't want to put more on the text than what's there. But I do think you see a unity of people that were not a people, but now have become a people in Christ. And so and this is why even I, I struggle with this here in the Bay area.

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Scott Dunford

And of course, you know, some of my church members were probably listening to this, and I wonder what they'll think about it. But, you know, we have ethnic churches all around us. And at one point that made sense. But at some point it becomes just an unnecessary division. You know, when you've got immigrant populations that are no longer immigrant, that have been worshiping together for, you know, numbers of years that are now fully American and yet are still ethnically distinct within a nation that is, you know, not and we're Christians.

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Scott Dunford

And so how do we push those barriers? And I think we should I I'm not one that says we need to have diversity for diversity sake, but I do think that our churches should reflect the diversity around us because, at the end of the day, I am not my ethnicity. I am Christ, and I

do think on the right and the left, you have these pushes toward an ethnic identity where Christ calls us to a spiritual identity as sons of Jesus.

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Scott Dunford

Sons of God. Yeah. That sense of God's a better way of putting the sons of Jesus. But, you know what I'm saying? We're in. Jesus.

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Alex Kocman

Yeah. There's so much good there that I want to respond to. So one, thing that I would, I would say is, just responding to your last statement, and then I want to talk about that globalizing impulse that you mentioned at the beginning, responding the last thing that you said, you know, your identity. Am I my nationality or am I my heritage or am I Christ's will obviously identity in Christ trumps those things.

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Alex Kocman

And you have statements in Colossians and in Galatians. In Christ there's no, you know, slave or free or male or female or do or Greek barbarian, Scythian, right. All or Christs and Christ is in all, etc. but at the same time, there is a sense in which those identities continue. You know, this is something that you find, also, you know, from Augustine to Aquinas to Louis, you know, dealing with the fact that there's still natural, factions that play into the Christian's life in Christ.

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Alex Kocman

There's no male or female, but I'm still male, and I'm still called to be faithful, not just as a Christian humanoid. I'm called to be faithful as a Christian man. There's certain duties that attend to my maleness, and I think the same thing applies to our other layers of identity.

And I'm as suspicious as you are of, you know, sort of the identity politicking that does happen.

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Alex Kocman

Really across culture. Right. And I think a lot of that has to do with how, uprooted we are from these traditional ways of thinking. We cling to all of these other identities. You know, as we're recording this, we're still in the month of June. I mean, people have flocked to LGBT as a tribal affiliation. Everybody wants to belong to something.

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Alex Kocman

So on some level, you know, identity and belonging to a group is unavoidable. But conversely, I that can obviously be taken too far. But I think just like there's a way for me to be a faithful Christian man, I think there's a way for me to be a faithful Christian citizen or a faithful Christian American and so forth.

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Alex Kocman

I think those specific layers, with that come duties, for instance, the duty of the fifth commandment to honor your fathers. I have a certain duty not only to honor my biological father, but also his father and his father before him, and ultimately, my forefathers, whether they immigrated here or whether they were present at the founding or a mix of both, because the bloodline is, you know, sort of all over the place.

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Alex Kocman

I'm kind of a European mutt. You're something of a European mutt yourself, too. I would imagine, but I, I want to speak to what you said about Christianity globalizing.

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Scott Dunford

I just want to respond to that honoring the father's thing, because I do see that a lot on social media. And I think that often that gets interpreted to mean I need to continue my, my forefathers.

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Alex Kocman

Culture.

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Scott Dunford

In every way or even sometimes protecting and defending their sinful attitudes. I see that a lot with sure lost cause Southerners, you know, are like, you know, we this is honoring our father, so this is keeping it. Know. Well, that is not the biblical idea of honoring your father. Meaning you have to continue in your father's false beliefs and religions.

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Scott Dunford

It means honoring them. Yeah. You know, obviously, I think in the, in the his Israelite context involved keeping their faith. But go ahead.

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Alex Kocman

I agree with you. But I would also say the joke on the show is that you always say I'm curious. And the joke on the show is that I'm always throwing Latin around to sound smart. So at the risk of doing my thing, abuses, not use them. Meaning the abuse of something does not negate.

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Scott Dunford

You members.

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Alex Kocman

Of something. Yeah, yeah. There you go. That's all of the Latin that I know. And there's no more outside of that. Maybe E pluribus unum. That's about it. But the abuse of something or the misapplication of a principle, the exception to a rule doesn't overthrow the rule. So I agree, right. There's a wrong way to interpret, the fifth commandment, where I'm sort of a racial, you know, determinist or a biological determinist.

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Alex Kocman

And that's wrong and sinful for multiple reasons. That doesn't mean, though, that the idea of me having obligations to my forefathers is entirely wrong. And there's a way to honor without agreeing with right. That's the other thing that happens with our living parents as well. I really do want to speak to Christianity. Does it lead to globalism in a certain sense, yes.

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Alex Kocman

Right. You know, every nation, tribe and tongue. That's the beautiful vision of scripture. Someone that I find really helpful on this, despite his not being a believer in Christ. Or maybe I'll sort of say as a prayer, not yet a Christian is your, his own, who's a conservative thinker? He's a Jewish, writer.

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Alex Kocman

He went to Princeton, if I recall correctly, from his, background. And he's actually currently living in Jerusalem. But, his, his way of tracing the Old Testament, way of thinking about humanity, I think is accurate. The Old Testament sort of worldview of assumptions is that you have households, you and all of this is ruled by, by men.

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Alex Kocman

Men are men are leaders, men are rulers, heads of house. But in the Old Testament you have households, and then you have out from their branches out a collection of related households, extended family. You could call the clan from their clans, bands together into tribes. Obviously, there's 12 tribes of Israel, and then nations are collections of related tribes.

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Alex Kocman

Again, the nation of Israel being the greatest example of this. What's interesting is if you trace what happens as Christianity inherits some of those Hebraic assumptions and spreads out into the world. For the past 2000 years, a lot of those same assumptions then work their way into Christendom, into the West, even into the East, to an extent.

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Alex Kocman

So there's all sorts of pagan concepts, conceptions of what a nation is, right? There's the idea that, you know, we're directly descended from the gods and everybody else is an animal. There's all sorts of wrong pagan ideas of nationhood. Christianity and the worldview of both New and Old Testaments is unique in that it gives dignity to nation as the fundamental unit.

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Alex Kocman

Obviously, the household in the individual figure prominently as well. But it dignifying this idea of the nation. So I see Scripture kind of pushing against two extremes, the one extreme of tribalism, right, where the nation can't unite behind God's anointed king, and tribal loyalties, you know, while, while permissible in one sense, can be taken too far, I also see Scripture pushing against this globalist ideal where we're all going to, completely homogenize and get rid of all of the distinctions.

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Alex Kocman

Again, that's sort of the Tower of Babel impulse. You know what? What can they do when they're all united together? Well, that seems to not be God's will because he disperses the people. Now, granted Pentecost, he sort of signals the ingathering. But then through the course of the book of acts and then through the course of church history, the effect is not that the church forms a literal nation, a metaphorical nation.

00:27:22:20 - 00:28:02:03

Alex Kocman

Yeah, a nation of priests. But it remains that each individual remains in their in their people group, in their in their language, in their culture, such that we send missionaries to each of those nations to contextualize, to adapt, the faith to be expressed in a faithful local indigenous sort of way. Right. So I see Scripture kind of pushing against this, this globalist vision, pushing against this tribal vision, and it signifies this idea of nations, which then is not to wax too long, but then you get into the period of, the medieval church, which really inherited its idea of empire from Rome.

00:28:02:05 - 00:28:26:00

Alex Kocman

But as that begins to break apart through schisms, through the Reformation, you really then have emerge this idea of distinct nations, nation states, following Westphalia. And here we are today, where we have nation states, not city states and not a one global state, but we have nation states. And you could say, well, is that what Scripture means by a nation?

00:28:26:02 - 00:28:43:23

Alex Kocman

Not precisely, but it's directly informed by this biblical thinking about nationhood that had sort of gotten into the water table. And, and real quick, I'll just add this last comment and let you speak. Brother, this is something that our friend Visal Megawati spoke to when we had him on the show maybe two years ago to speak about this.

00:28:44:01 - 00:29:01:22

Alex Kocman

And I think he's right. I think when we adopt just a sociological view of people, groups or nations, in other words, we would say, well, it's ethno linguistic people groups, but it doesn't have anything to do with, you know, nation states or it doesn't have anything to do with borders or anything else like that. That's helpful in certain ways.

00:29:02:00 - 00:29:35:04

Alex Kocman

It helps me think through who are the hidden tribes and people groups that are unreached. But in other ways it's unhelpful because I think the net effect of that is to say, all that matters is reaching different types of peoples. But we're not actually thinking about how Christianity goes public in a nation, in a country, and actually affects, not just individuals in these people groups, but, nations themselves, you know, not just making disciples of the nations or out of the nations, but actually discipling nations and groups as a whole.

00:29:35:04 - 00:29:55:01

Alex Kocman

And I look into history, you know, I see the way that the Irish helped save civilization because Christianity didn't just come to a couple of Irish people, it came to the Irish. You know, I think of I think of, Knox's prayer. You know, he prays, give me Scotland or I die. I think of a friend of mine who's African American who prays, give me the black church, Lord, or I die.

00:29:55:01 - 00:30:15:11

Alex Kocman

He's so passionate for the people in his community. And so, I think of our missionary ambition. Should be. Lord, give me America as a people or peoples. Because we're a multi-ethnic polity. But give me my people. Each for each person. You know, if I, if I go into this country over here, you know, I'm bringing the gospel to India.

00:30:15:16 - 00:30:32:02

Alex Kocman

I want those people to say, Lord, give me this province, give me India, or I die. And I think that distinction all comes together in the plan of God. And I think it can be an important thing to emphasize as long as Scripture is our North star on this, and not just a political fad.

00:30:32:04 - 00:30:35:18

Scott Dunford

Let's pick it up in the overtime. I think we're out of time for this episode, but.

00:30:35:18 - 00:31:00:00

Alex Kocman

We will have Scott respond to my long winded answer to his question in the overtime, and we hope that you join us along for the ride. There's a lot to talk about here. So many different implications. Let us know what you think. And if you have a guest that you think would be good to hop into this conversation as well, email Alex at Missionspodcast.com or Scottadmissionspodcast.com.

00:31:00:02 - 00:31:20:02

Alex Kocman

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continue that conversation with you. We also want you to know that the Missions podcast is a ministry of ABWE, a global missions family making disciples in 91 nations.

00:31:20:02 - 00:31:44:19

Alex Kocman

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