

Despising our Birthright

Boundary Stones, and the dangers of moving them are illustrated many times in Scripture, as *Jon Garvey* shows

The seriousness of the European issue demands very careful application of Scripture. The curse of Deuteronomy 27.17 was not to fix national boundaries, but to condemn the *theft* of an Israelite neighbour's birthright. The key text is Deuteronomy 19.14, which forbids moving your neighbour's (not your own) boundary stone, because it marks his inheritance in the land.

After Joshua's conquest, Canaan was divided among the Israelites by lot, so each family's land was the direct covenant-gift of God. To move a marker, dispossessing your neighbour of his blessing, was a sin against God himself, and so led to God's curse. Theft was the issue, and not the permanence of the boundary itself, as is shown by Job 24.2, where moving boundary stones is compared with pasturing stolen flocks. The context is of social injustice, not boundaries.

Is it right, then, to compare stealing your neighbour's inheritance with dissolving the boundaries between nations by agreement, as in Europe's case? In one sense yes. Deuteronomy 32.8 says that God gave *all*

the nations their inheritance, setting up boundaries for the peoples. Similarly Acts 17.26 says that God determined the exact times and places for the various nations.

However, various things show that these boundaries are not necessarily permanent:

- Not one of the original nations listed in Genesis 10 still exists.
- Even Israel's boundaries have changed many times, from expansion under David and Solomon to extinction after the Jewish revolt of 130AD. Israel's growth was often under God's blessing, and never provoked his curse.
- Our nation's present boundaries have only existed for a generation. Before that was the Empire, before that a separate Scotland and Ireland, then the Angevin empire of which we were only a part, then Saxon kingdoms, Roman provinces, Celtic tribes and so on back to the Stone Age.

We are a changing people living within variable boundaries. Are we then under a perpetual curse

for all these changes? Clifford Denton's article says, on the contrary, that we have been blessed and used by God, because of a coronation oath associated with the union of English and Scottish crowns!

So the making of voluntary treaties, like the Treaty of Rome, need not automatically invoke a curse. In fact in Scripture the coalition of Medo-Persia received God's *blessing* as the instrument of Babylon's downfall. This example shows the commonest Biblical explanation of national boundary changes: *God's* working out of his purposes of blessing or judgement. Job 12.23ff says that *God* makes nations great and destroys them, enlarging them, dispersing them, even depriving their leaders of reason. This insight offers a better approach to understanding the risks of European integration. Might not God be shaking the nations by allowing their leaders to rush into a

plan which risks social injustice and political unrest, all in the name of greater peace and harmony?

If so our national sin is not abolishing boundaries between nations, but lusting after economic gain at the expense of the people's right

to a government which represents their interests and protects them from exploitation. For the role of governments is to govern _ to punish wrong and reward right (Romans 13.1ff), and to collect taxes for this. A nation which voluntarily hands over to others the right to govern is surely deserting its responsibility before God, and deserves whatever injustice it receives.

Moving a boundary stone robs your neighbour surreptitiously of his birthright. But giving your sovereignty away openly despises your *own* birthright, which is worse. This was what Esau did, in Genesis 25, when he sold his birthright to his younger brother Jacob for gain (in this case, a bowl of stew rather than a common currency!). From that time on we find him cursed by God throughout Scripture for despising his God-given blessing. This surely is the greatest danger we must fear in our relationship to Europe. **PT**