

Adult Sunday School
Lesson 502 - Why do nations have flags?

THEME: His banner over us is Love

BEGIN WITH A GAME: Before we begin, let's play a quick game. I'm going to show you a flag, and let's see if you can guess which country it belongs to.

TEXT:

Psalms 60

4 Thou hast **given a banner** to them that fear thee, that it may be **displayed** because of the truth. Selah.

Song of Solomon 2

4 He brought me to the banqueting house, and **his banner over me was love.**

John 13

35 By this shall **all men know** that ye are my disciples, **if ye have love** one to another.

LESSON:

Q: Why Does Every Nation Have Flags?

If you are like me, you may be constantly amused at how we seem to 'know' more about the vocal sounds, diets, and mating habits of 'prehistoric dinosaurs' that lived some ill-determined amount of years ago than we do about, what should be, relatively recent history.

I find it funny that no one knows how 'April Fools' day came to be, nor why nearly every culture seems to have a version of it around on the same date. Why is everybody celebrating this almost universal day of pranking?!?

So, let's begin today's lesson with an easy question for an adult. **WHY DO ALL NATIONS HAVE FLAGS?!?** And, if this is a spontaneous conclusion all nations came to, why do they all happen to be the **SAME SHAPE?! Is there more than coincidence at work here?**

BIBLICAL FLAGS:

Would you like to know something interesting? Flags are mentioned quite a bit in the Bible. Check this out:

Exodus 2

3 And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of

bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the **flags** by the river's brink.

5 And the daughter of Pharaoh came down to wash herself at the river; and her maidens walked along by the river's side; and when she saw the ark among the **flags**, she sent her maid to fetch it.

Isaiah 19

6 And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defence shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and **flags** shall wither.

Job 8

11 Can the rush grow up without mire? can the **flag** grow without water?

Say WHAAT?!? I think you can see pretty clearly just how MUCH modern English has changed since 1611. While the word 'Flag' is used, it is not talking about what we now call flags, the Bible DOES still have something to say about this subject.

***Sub-Lesson:** Sometimes we search the Bible for 'depression' or things we need help or answers on. Just because you can't find anything quick off the bat doesn't mean the Bible doesn't deal with the issue. Many times, we are just searching for modern terms, instead of the proper term.*

When we search the words, "**Banner**" and "**Standard**", we find all sorts of information, as well as a good solid clue as to why people used them.

Numbers 1

52 And the children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every man by his own camp, and every man **by his own standard**, throughout their hosts.

Numbers 2

2 Every man of the children of Israel shall pitch **by his own standard**, with the ensign of their father's house: far off about the tabernacle of the congregation shall they pitch.

Isaiah 10

18 And shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a **standard-bearer** fainteth.

Isaiah 62

10 Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; **lift up a standard** for the people.

1.) A SOURCE OF IDENTITY

It seems to be a valid claim that flags/standards were used originally for military purposes... in ancient times when rival clans fought, all the way up to when kings and emperors drew attention to the banners and flags they flew.

Primarily, these 'war wraps' consisted of simple, vivid colors that were easily identifiable at a great distance. The Bible records that 'Standards' or 'Banners' were used like mini-portable-landmarks.

But, let me ask you, WHY would you carry a 'banner' over your army in the first place? To precisely let the enemy archers know where to aim their arrows? ... And clue them in on the wind direction and speed? This might seem to be a rather BAD idea, back in the day, if you think about it.

Some historians surmised that it could have been popularly used, rather, as an aerial marker to let your 'gods' know which group they needed to protect?

More likely it would be to orient your troops. One would think that the enemy will always be the one you are facing, right? Yet, it makes sound sense that historically the colors helped in the confusion of battle to know who was friend and who was foe. There is no denying that flags provide a quick and ready **SOURCE OF IDENTITY**.

2.) A REPRESENTATION:

ILL – US Coast Guardsman Quatermaster Robert Resnick at the time was serving aboard the USS Duval County at the pacific islands. The door of his stock room burst open and a sweaty, hurried Lt. Tuttle came charging aboard the LST-758 on the morning of Feb. 23rd, looking for a flag.

Resnick grabbed a flag from a bunting box... a quite large 96"x56" US Flag, and handed it over to Ganon. Resnick had no idea that this flag was about to become one of the most iconic pictures in history, as it is known around the world as the 'Raising of the Flag on Iwo Jima.' And Resnick did not admit to having any part of it until 2001 just before he died in 2004.

... But, Did you know that this was actually the SECOND flag to be raised on Iwo Jima?

Despite the large number of Japanese troops controlling the area, 1st Lt. Harold Shrier and 5 others were dispatched to install a 'secret weapon' at the crest of the crater known as Mt. Suribachi. Taking his delicate package, he received these orders from Lt. Colonel Johnson, "If you get to the top, put it up."

At 8am, the six began the deadly climb, and surprisingly enough, there was very little resistance, as the enemy was occupied by the bombardment of the island from the ships in the Iwo Jima waters. At 10:15, the six crested the crater, and, finding an old rusty Japanese water pipe, they fastened and raised a small 54"x28" American Flag.

And inadvertently started a war-within-a-war.

Raising the national colors immediately caused a loud cheering reaction from the Marines, sailors, and coast guardsmen on the beach below, and from the men on the ships! The loud ruckus and blasts of the ships horns shook the Japanese soldiers from their panic and the fighting began in earnest.

And THEN the sub-war began when Secretary of the Navy, James Forrestal, who had decided that he needed to see 1st hand the final battle on the island, and his commanding officer Howlin' Mad Smith, arrived on shore just as the flag was being raised. The shouts and enthusiasm was overwhelming. With emotions strong, Smith shouted, "Holland, the raising of that flag on Sheribachi means a Marine Corps for the next five hundred years!"

James Forrestal was so taken with emotion that he decided that he must have the 2nd Battalion's flag waving on Mt. Suribachi as his own souvenir...
... this command was sent out, and when the 2nd Battalion heard it, Johnson, who had dispatched the 1st flag to be raised, was outraged! This flag belonged to his Battalion! Immediately he dispatched Lt. Ted Tuttle to procure a replacement flag and swap them out. As an after thought, Johnson called after Tuttle, "... And make it a bigger one!"

Flags are used as a visual or symbolic representation of your country, just as an anthem is an audible representation of your country.

DID YOU KNOW: The 'Union Jack' of England is made up of the 'cross of St. George (saint of the English) on top of the 'cross of st. Andrew (saint of Scotland) on top of cross of st. Patrick (Saint of Ireland)... the three countries that make up the union.

DID YOU KNOW: One of the oldest flags still in use today is the Flag of Denmark, which dates all the way back to the crusades.

Regardless of the exact 'Why', flags are here to stay, and most often serve as a symbol of unification and identity.

The **American flag**, at one point, was treated with the utmost respect, as nothing was allowed to fly higher than the American flag, it was not allowed to be made into clothing (*lest it potentially could be dirtied*), it was not allowed to touch the ground, and it had a specific way of folding/storing it... and even a specific way of disposing of old flags.

DID YOU KNOW? The flag should never be used for any advertising purpose, nor embroidered on cushions or handkerchiefs, printed on paper napkins or boxes, nor used as any portion of a costume.

Obviously, our commercialism is a force to be reckoned with, as you can find American Flag clothing and decorations about everywhere... from Pallet projects to door stops... who'dve thought that desecrating the 'Old Glory' could be so patriotic?

ILL - The United States found out the hard way that some nations hold their flags with great respect. When we went to Afghanistan, America attempted to communicate 'peace' and 'unity' with the Afghan youth by giving away special edition soccer balls. This special edition replaced

the traditional black checks on the ball with nations flags, as a symbol of ‘unity’ and ‘peace.’ This did much more harm than good.

For some reason, the Afghanistan flag as their holy creed emblazoned on both sides of the flag (*so that it can always be read correctly*) and the idea of kicking their nations holy creed about the dirt with their dirty feet seemed... well, BLASPHEMOUS!

Marketing needs more exposure to religion than ever. They are going to get us killed one of these days trying to make a buck.

3.) COMMUNICATION

On the high seas, flags were used as a means of communication. What nation you served, what your intentions were, etc. etc.

During the age of exploration, flags also garnered the use of ‘Proclamation of Ownership’. From planting flags on the New World, to the top of Mount Everest, to Raising it over forts and capitals, to even putting them on the Moon. (*Lest any OTHER visitors there get the idea that no one has claimed it yet.*)

Q: Why the shape? And why is it so standardized?

Isn't it Ironic how everyone strives so hard to be different... but they all HAVE to have the same kinds of things?

It is commonly held that a rectangular flag catches the wind the best... it ‘flaps’ the best in the wind. Nepal and Switzerland both have square flags. But then, you’ve seen their Army Knife... so making great hot chocolate is a higher national priority than making an impression.

DID YOU KNOW: Sir Edmund Hillary (New Zealand) and Tenzing Norgay (Nepal) successfully reached the peak of Mount Everest, and planted a BRITISH ‘union jack’ there at the summit in 1953? Why did they pick the Union Jack? – Seemed appropriate as the expedition was financed and organized by Britain.

If you are thinking, no wait. SOME flags are triangles... no. Those are Pennants.

4.) THE SUMMARY:

The Christian has a flag. No, it’s not white with a blue square and red cross in the upper-left. Christ’s banner over us is LOVE.

John 13

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Paul clarifies in **1 Corinthians 13** that it doesn’t matter in the slightest how many great and noble works you or I do... if they are done without Charity, or sans LOVE, they are worthless.

- How many times have I prayed for someone without loving them?
- How many times have I given something away without love?
- How many times have I wished happy birthday, or even shared the gospel without genuine love?

1 Peter 4

8 And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

And

1 Peter 1

22 Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto **unfeigned love** of the brethren, see that ye **love one another** with a **pure** heart fervently:

23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

You see, knowledge puffeth up, but CHARITY (love) edifieth! (**1 Corinthians 8:1**)

WHY? The example given in **1 Corinthians** deals with the matter of causing a fellow Christian to stumble in our meat. (*Pertaining to eating meat offered to idols.*) The knowledge spoken of is the knowledge that there is only one God, and thus the meat was offered in vain.

If someone offers me meat, I'm not to ask where it came from. But if they specifically say that it was offered to idols, I'm not to partake for the sake of the host offering the pagan meat, and for the sake of my brother in Christ who came from a background of idolatry.

The edification was not in the knowledge but in the **CHARITY** of not causing a brother to stumble who did not yet have this same understanding but rather came from a background of idolatry.

If, according to Christ, LOVE is the fulfillment of the law, then it makes perfect sense that the Banner over every Christian is love.

Galatians 5

14 For all the **law is fulfilled** in one word, even in this; Thou shalt **love** thy neighbour as thyself.

The standard Christ has set for the Christian is one of Truth and Love, and to march under any other standard than this is to march apart from the band of Christ.