

## **WHAT ABOUT THE GENTILES?**

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We have recently come back from Istanbul (the old Constantinople). Lots of history ... warm ... friendly ... open people. Quite an attractive culture — good food — wines are fine ... enjoyable to sit outdoors ... Turkish coffee or tea ... just watching the world go by.

In our visits ... we have always felt very safe ... always been impressed by how clean much of the city is. The restaurants ... parks ... gardens ... pavements — all immaculate.

But of course ... Turkey is a “Gentile” country. My wife reminded me of when we first came into the Church ... there was a sort of feeling or impression ... that Gentile countries or establishments ... could never be quite as good as Israelite countries. They would always be inferior in some way.

So Australia ... New Zealand ... Canada ... Britain ... USA — are better. But implied was ... “watch out” for many other “Gentile” countries. We had the strong impression that Israelite countries are intrinsically superior (at least on the whole) ... to Gentile countries ... probably inferior.

Yet ... much of what we’ve experienced in “Gentile” Turkey and other “Gentile” countries that we have visited ... is superior to “Israelite” England — politeness ... cleanliness etc.

It reminded me of an experience at my 2<sup>nd</sup> Feast of Tabernacles that I went to in 1975. A young man ... Vic ... and I went off one evening to enjoy some fine Feast dining. But it was the off-season in the town and most of the restaurants were closed for the season ... not just for the night. The first up-market place we found was a swanky Indian restaurant.

Vic felt we should not go in. He’d been told (possibly by the minister?) ... that Church members like us ... should avoid Gentile establishments. I’d not heard that before ... but Vic had been around the Church a couple of years more than me ... so I considered him to be an “expert”.

An hour later ... guess what? ... we ended up in the posh Indian restaurant ... 😊  
... and had a great meal!

There certainly was some sort of impression in the Church that Gentiles were in some way considered inferior to Israelites (such as we British of the Tribe of Ephraim).

I don't recollect this ever being formally taught ... and I never thought at the time to have a chat with those Church members from foreign backgrounds (lots of West Indians) ... to see if they felt at all put down by this type of attitude.

I may have assumed that once in the Church ... there was neither Jew nor Greek ... we're all one in Christ — so no longer really an issue?

I don't know how widespread this tendency to look at Gentiles and Gentile countries as inferior to Israelite ones is? You may not have come across it.

So today I want to clarify what the Bible actually teaches about Gentiles. And why I think it's a word we're actually best to avoid using!

You may say, "But the term Gentile is used lots of time in the Bible. It must be okay to use". Well — yes ... and ... no.

Most people take the word "Gentile" to mean "Non-Jewish". In the Church of God ... we'd probably say "Non-Israelite".

So we'd see the world's population divided into two groups — Israelites and Gentiles — essentially a racial division. Unfortunately ... too often it includes an implication that one of the racial groups (Israel) is inherently superior to the other (Gentiles).

**NONE OF THAT IS BIBLICAL!**

In the Old Testament the word "Gentile" is translated from the Hebrew "Goy" or "Goyim" (plural). The Hebrew form appears around 560 times.

Approximately 370 times in the KJV — translated as "Nation".

- 11 times as "people".
- 143 times as "heathen".

- 30 times as “Gentiles”.

“Nations” and “people” are very safe words? No criticism implied ... no judgment.

But “heathen” — implies uncivilised — people lacking in morals and principles. “Gentiles” not quite as bad as “heathen”. You’d wonder why the translators use 4 English words to translate the same Hebrew word? The answer to that is, “God only knows”.

Let’s have a look.

### **Genesis 10:5**

5 From these the coastland peoples of the **Gentiles** were separated into their lands, everyone according to his language, according to their families, into their **nations**.

“Gentiles” (1st appearance of this word in the KJV and NKJV) ... “nations” = Goyim.

### **Genesis 10:20**

20 These were the sons of Ham, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands and in their **nations**.

Nations = Goyim

### **Genesis 10:31-32**

31 These were the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their languages, in their lands, according to their **nations**.

32 These were the families of the sons of Noah, according to their generations, in their **nations**; and from these the **nations** were divided on the earth after the flood.

“Nations” used 5 times and “Gentiles” once = Goyim

The same word in Hebrew. Why use Gentiles in verse 5? There is no sensible reason for that. Bias?

Many modern translations use “nations” consistently.

### **Genesis 12:1-2**

1 Now the Lord had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,  
From your family  
And from your father’s house,  
To a land that I will show you.

2 **I will make you a great nation;**

I will bless you  
And make your name great;  
And you shall be a blessing.

“Great nation” = Goy

Abram to be the Father of the Gentiles? Father of Heathens? It makes no sense!

Abram’s grandson was Jacob/Israel. So ... are the “Israelites” a great bunch of Gentiles??

### **Genesis 17:1-6**

1 When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

2 And I will make My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.”

3 Then Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying:

4 **“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be a father of many nations.**

5 No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for **I have made you a father of many nations.**

6 I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and **I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.**

“Nations” used 3 times = Goyim

The translators avoid using the term “Gentiles” — though it’s the same Hebrew word. They are biased. They know “Gentiles” is a demeaning word ... they don’t want to apply it to Abraham.

But God does! He makes no distinction! God is consistent.

### **Genesis 18:16-18**

16 Then the men rose from there and looked toward Sodom, and Abraham went with them to send them on the way.

17 And the Lord said, "**Shall I hide from Abraham what I am doing,**

**18 since Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?**"

"Nation(s)" = Goy and Goyim

**God uses the same word for Abraham's descendants ... and all nations of the whole world!**

Israel is a specific nation. Likewise today ... Italy ... Korea ... Mexico ... Russia ... are nations. But God uses the same term for all. There isn't an inferior or second-class group called Gentiles — who are on a lower level to Israelites or Jews.

### **Genesis 35:9-12**

9 Then God appeared to Jacob again, when he came from Padan Aram, and blessed him.

10 And God said to him, "**Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob anymore, but Israel shall be your name.**" So He called his name Israel.

11 Also God said to him: "**I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you, and kings shall come from your body.**"

12 The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land."

"Nation ... company of nations". USA? And ... British Commonwealth? But Hebrew: Goy and Goyim.

Why not translate as Heathen or Gentiles?

Israel is the Father of the Gentiles?

The whole concept of the term "Gentile" — as we use it — is not Biblical.

### **Exodus 19:3-6**

3 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel:

4 You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself.

5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.

6 And **you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

"A holy nation" = Goy.

The way God uses the Hebrew words Goy/Goyim is neutral. There is no hint by God ... of inferiority ... condescension ... distaste.

Yet many churchgoers (and Jews in particular) do use the term "Gentile" often in a derogatory way. IT DOESN'T COME FROM THE BIBLE.

### **Ezekiel 2:1-3**

1 And He said to me, "Son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak to you."

2 Then the Spirit entered me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.

3 And He said to me: "**Son of man, I am sending you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against Me;** they and their fathers have transgressed against Me to this very day.

"Rebellious nation" ... the "children of Israel" = Goyim.

Even in prophecy ... God's own nation Israel is referred to as Goyim. Properly ... a neutral word that God uses for all nations. Translating as "Gentile" or "Heathen" is clearly inappropriate here — and everywhere! It carries too much emotional baggage ... distaste! I'd say don't use it anywhere.

Goy or Goyim should only be translated as nations ... or people. And it includes Israel ... God Himself applies Goyim to Israel dozens of times.

### **Isaiah 11:6-7**

6 "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb,  
The leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together;  
And a little child shall lead them.

7 The cow and the bear shall graze;  
Their young ones shall lie down together;

And the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

**Isaiah 11:10-12**

10 “And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse,  
Who shall stand as a banner to the people;

**For the Gentiles shall seek Him, (“Gentiles” ... the word is Goyim)**

And His resting place shall be glorious.”

11 It shall come to pass in that day  
That the Lord shall set His hand again the second time  
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,  
From Assyria and Egypt,  
From Pathros and Cush,  
From Elam and Shinar,  
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.

12 **He will set up a banner for the nations,**  
And will assemble the outcasts of Israel,  
And gather together the dispersed of Judah  
From the four corners of the earth.

“Gentiles” ... “nations” — both — Goyim.

There is no sensible reason for using different words here.

Whenever I read any passages where the words “Gentiles” or “heathen” appear ... I mentally replace with “nation(s)”.

If any Old Testament writer had wanted to specifically refer to a non-Israelite ... he could use the Hebrew word for “foreigner” or “alien”. Goyim never has this meaning.

However ... it seems to be largely down to the Pharisees who started to use the term “Goyim” to apply to non-Jews ... in a derogatory way. They looked down on the other nations ... saw them as unclean ... to be avoided. The Pharisees ultimately created a racial distinction between the Jews and everybody else.

Culturally ... the Jewish people came to look down on all others. Just like some Church of God people who see themselves as national Israel can have a tendency to look down on non-Israelites (using the term “Gentile”). Like my Indian restaurant experience.

We can see this developing in:

### **Acts 10:9-17**

9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, **Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour.**

10 **Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance**

11 **and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth.**

12 **In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air.**

13 **And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat."**

14 **But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean."**

15 **And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common."**

16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again.

17 Now while Peter wondered within himself what this vision which he had seen meant, behold, the men who had been sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate.

### **Acts 10:24-29**

24 And **the following day they entered Caesarea. Now Cornelius was waiting for them, and had called together his relatives and close friends.**

25 As Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him.

26 But **Peter** lifted him up, saying, "Stand up; I myself am also a man."

27 And as he talked with him, he went in and found many who had come together.

28 Then he **said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean.**

29 Therefore I came without objection as soon as I was sent for. I ask, then, for what reason have you sent for me?"

Peter speaking: "Unlawful"? But ...what law is Peter referring to?! There is no Bible law. The only law was the law of the Scribes and the Pharisees!

God had to intervene in a special way to show Peter there is no distinction in the nations. Peter had been taught to avoid the Goyim ... the other nations.

Remember Paul's account in Galatians Chapter 2. He stood up to Peter who had been eating with the Greeks ... until some important Jews came from Jerusalem. Then Peter deserted the Greeks! The social pressure was too strong ... as so many Jews looked down on the Goyim. "Us and them".

In Old Testament times ... God only worked with one nation ... Israel. He revealed Himself to them ... gave them His laws and statutes ... blessed them ... chose them to be an example and a light. So they were special in view of what they knew ... and their part in God's plan for that time. But intrinsically ... there is no distinction between Israel and any other nation — because they are all nations.

Israel is not superior nationally or racially.

We have mostly been in the Old Testament — Hebrew Goyim. Nation(s)!

Let's have a quick review of the New Testament.

The New Testament is in Greek. There is no word in the Greek language for people who are "non-Israelites" or "non-Jews". Why would Greeks ever have thought of such a word anyway!?

The equivalent New Testament word to Goyim is "Ethnos" (as in "Ethnic").

It appears over 160 times.

Translated in the KJV     > 90 times as "Gentiles"  
                                     64 times as "Nation"  
                                     5 times as "Heathen"  
                                     2 times as "People"

"Nations" and "people" are neutral. "Gentiles" and "Heathen" are judgmental words — and imply there is some sort of problem with these people.

As with the Old Testament — it's best to avoid thinking of our modern opinion of "Gentile" ... and mentally replace ... consistently with "nation(s)" or "people".

### **Matthew 28:18-20**

18 And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

19 **Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations**, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.

"Nations" = Ethnos.

A good translation. Neutral. Accurate. It would have made no sense to have used the word "Gentiles"?

### **Mark 13:5-8**

5 And Jesus, answering them, began to say: "Take heed that no one deceives you.

6 For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am He,' and will deceive many.

7 But when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be troubled; for such things must happen, but the end is not yet.

8 **For nation will rise against nation**, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be earthquakes in various places, and there will be famines and troubles. These are the beginnings of sorrows.

"Nations" used twice.

### **Mark 13:10**

10 **And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.** (Or "people")

Gospel preaching must include the Jews and the House of Israel.

### **Luke 7:1-5**

1 Now when He concluded all His sayings in the hearing of the people, He entered Capernaum.

2 And a certain centurion's servant, who was dear to him, was sick and ready to die.

3 So when he heard about Jesus, he sent elders of the Jews to Him, pleading with Him to come and heal his servant.

4 And when they came to Jesus, they begged Him earnestly, saying that the one for whom He should do this was deserving,

5 **“for he loves our nation**, and has built us a synagogue.”

So the Jewish elders call themselves an Ethnos!

It can't possibly be correct to translate Ethnos as “Gentile”. It's misleading — implies some negative quality about a people that is not in the Hebrew or Greek.

#### **Acts 13:42-48**

42 So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, **the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath.**

43 Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

44 On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God.

45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul.

46 **Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.**

47 For so the Lord has commanded us:

**I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,**

That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.’ ”

48 Now **when the Gentiles heard this**, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

“Gentiles” used here 4 times = Ethnos.

It is much better to translate consistently as “nations” (or sometimes “people”) ... rather than deliberately using a “loaded” word at the translators' whim.

Young's Literal Bible and J P Green's Interlinear Bible use “nations” in all of these verses. The word “Gentiles” doesn't appear in their Bibles anywhere.

Incidentally ... Paul uses “Ethnos” in verse 47 to translate the Hebrew Goyim from Isaiah 42:6 — showing that they are equivalent.

#### **Galatians 1:15-17**

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace,

16 **to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles**, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

“Preach among the Gentiles” (NKJV)

“Preach among the Heathen” (KJV)

“Preach among the Nations” (YLT and DARBY)

Scripturally the same word is used for all nations — Israelite or other. Goyim or Ethnos.

Selecting to translate here and there as “heathen” or “Gentile” brings in implications or negative overtones that don't exist in the Bible.

Not all nations are equal. Obviously nations differ. Wealth ... education ... natural resources ... political stability ... crime ... world power and influence.

One of the Jews' advantages was they had the Oracles of God — others didn't!

But it would be wrong for any professing Israelite to look down on any person or nation that they perceive to be Gentile. And vice-versa —no one who thinks of themselves as a Gentile should feel remotely inferior to someone who purports to be an Israelite.

That whole concept is not Biblical.

My approach when reading the Bible is to just mentally replace the words “Gentiles” or “Heathen” by “nation” (occasionally ... “people”). It might be something you'd like to try?

The bottom line is: God uses the same word for everybody! It might be safer for us too!

