

CHAPTER 5

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

BIBLICAL GENTILES

NOTE: This chapter was extracted from the book "[The Mystery of THE GENTILES](#)" by Evangelist Ted R. Weiland.

It would not be much of a mystery if the gentiles in the Bible were simply non-Israelites to whom Yahshua granted salvation through His propitiating sacrifice. But it *would* be intriguing if some of these gentiles fulfilled Bible prophecies that were intended for Israelites. What if these gentiles were somehow racially related to the Israelites of biblical antiquity, and the redemption and remarriage that Yahweh promised to the divorced and dispersed Israelites actually applied to certain gentiles in the New Testament? Could some of the gentiles actually be other than whom they are commonly considered to be? These possibilities present a much more perplexing puzzle than simply that salvation was granted to non-Israelites.

To correctly answer the foregoing questions, a person must become familiar with two words, one Hebrew and one Greek. In the Old Testament, the English word "gentiles" is translated from the Hebrew words "לְגוֹי" (*goy* — singular) and "לְגוֹיִם" (*goyim* — plural). Their New Testament Greek counterparts are "ἔθνος" (*ethnos* — singular) and "ἔθνη" (*ethne* — plural). Many Christians erroneously believe that gentiles, *goyim* and *ethne* refer exclusively to non-Jews or non-Israelites.

In the King James Old Testament, the Hebrew words "goy" and "goyim" are translated nation(s) 373 times, heathen(s) 142 times, gentiles 30 times, people(s) 11 times, and another 1 time. Not once is *goy* or *goyim* translated non-Jew or non-Israelite.

In the King James New Testament, the Greek words "ethnos" and "ethne" are translated gentiles 93 times, nation(s) 64 times, heathen(s) 5 times, people(s) 2 times and Greek 1 time. Not once is *ethnos* or *ethne* translated non-Jew or non-Israelite.

Because most people think that the Jews in the Bible represent all twelve tribes of Israel, they inevitably jump to the unwarranted conclusion that the term "gentiles," especially when used in contrast with the term "Jews," refers exclusively to non-Israelites. The following quotations represent this thinking:

Gentiles ... All nations of the world other than the Jews....¹

The Heb. *goyim* signified the nations, the surrounding nations, foreigners as opposed to Israel.²

Heb. *Goi*, "the nations" (or "heathen," derived from the Gr. *ethne*), as opposed to Israel (Neh. v. 8).³

¹ "Gentiles," *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1944) p. 199.

² "Gentile," *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1966) p. 465.

³ "Gentiles," *Fausset's Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963) p. 316.

Gentiles: all the peoples of the world who are non-Jews. In the New Testament, a Gentile designates any lost member of the human race who is not a Jew.⁴

NOT ONCE IS *GOY* OR
GOYIM TRANSLATED
NON-JEW OR NON-
ISRAELITE.

The word translated as “GENTILES” is often translated as “NATIONS.” It is the word “ETHNOS” from which we derive “ETHNIC.” All people who are not JEWS are GENTILES regardless of their ethnic origin.⁵

In the New Testament, the word for “Gentiles” (Greek *ethnos*) is also translated “nations” and “heathen.” The corresponding Hebrew word in the Old Testament is *goi*. That is, all nations outside God’s covenant people of Israel, were called “Gentiles,” or “heathen,” or simply the “nations.”⁶

The term “Gentiles” in the New Testament always refers to people and nations outside of and apart from all the twelve tribes of Israel...It can be said positively that IN NO CASE IN THE BIBLE, either in the Old Testament or in the New, DOES THE WORD “GENTILE” REFER OR APPLY TO ANY PART OF ISRAEL.⁷

The words “gentiles,” “*goy*” and “*ethnos*” are *not* the exclusionary terms that these authors have attempted to make them. For example, try replacing the word “nations” translated from *goyim*, with the word “non-Israelites” in Genesis 25:23 where Rebekah was informed about her twin boys, Jacob and Esau:

And Yahweh said unto her, Two **non-Israelites** are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Try the same in Genesis 48:19 where Jacob blesses Joseph’s second son Ephraim:

..he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of **non-Israelites**.

Try replacing the word “nation” with “non-Israelite” in Jeremiah 31:35-36 where Yahweh promised both houses of Israel that He would never forsake them as long as the sun rules by day and the moon by night:

Thus saith Yahweh, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; Yahweh of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith Yahweh, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a **non-Israelite** before me for ever.

⁴ Tim LaHaye, Rapture under Attack: Will You Escape the Tribulation? (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1998) p. 233.

⁵ Randy Shupe, “God’s Dispensational Truth,” The Prophetic Word (Arvada, CO: Apostolic Missions, Inc., 1997) January, p. 3.

⁶ Henry Morris, Ph.D., “Heathen Darkness,” Days of Praise (Santee, CA: Institute for Creation Research).

⁷ Anton Darms, The Delusion of British-Israelism: A Comprehensive Treatise (New York, NY: Loizeaux Brothers, Bible Truth Press, 1940) pp. 72-73.

The three preceding examples demonstrate that the definition and application of the Hebrew word “*goyim*” is not as narrow as some people would make it.

The same is true for its Greek counterpart “*ethne*.” If modern Christianity’s definition for *ethnos* is correct, John 18:35 would have to be translated as follows:

Pilate answered, Am I a Judahite? Thine own **non-Israelites** and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me: what hast thou done?

Ethnos and *ethne* have a much broader use in the New Testament than is commonly understood. Consider the following four examples.

The first employs the word “gentiles” (*ethne*) in reference to non-Israelites, specifically Canaanites:

Our [Israelite] fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus [the Old Testament Joshua] into the possession of **the Gentiles**, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers.... Acts 7:44-45

The second example uses the word “nations” (*ethne*) in reference to a multi-ethnic multitude of people, non-Israelite and Israelite alike:

And hath made of one blood **all nations of men** for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation. Acts 17:26

The third example employs the word “nation” (*ethnos*) in reference to Judahites, descendants of the house of Judah, the two southern tribes of Israel:

And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all **the nation of the Judahites**. Acts 10:22

The fourth example uses the word “gentiles” (*ethne*) in reference to Israelites, the descendants of the house of Israel, the ten northern tribes of Israel:

And that he [Yahweh] might make known the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom he hath called, not of the Judahites only, but also of **the Gentiles**? Romans 9:23-24

We will return to this last passage in chapter 6 because some people may question this interpretation and also because it provides important clues for solving the mystery.

Even without accepting the application for *ethne* in Romans 9:23-24, it should be apparent from the other three passages, as well as many others, that there is a much broader use of the Greek words “*ethnos*” and “*ethne*” than what is usually taught. Lexicographers also provide the broader application. Consider the following definitions for the Greek word “*ethnos*:”

.1. **a multitude** (whether of men or of beasts) associated or living together; **a company, troop, swarm**.... 2. **a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus** ... Acts 17:26.... 3. **Race, nation**: Mt. 21:43; Acts 10:35, etc. ... of **the Jewish people**, Lk. 22:25; used (in the sing.) of **the Jewish people**, Lk. 7:5; 23:2.... 4. ... in the O.T., **foreign nations not worshipping the true God, pagans**,

Gentiles ... Mt. 4:15 and very often; **in plain contradistinction to the Jews:** Ro. 3:29.... 5. Paul uses ... τᾶ ἔθνη even of **Gentile Christians:** Ro. 11:13; 15:27....⁸

There are 64 passages in the NT where we have ἔθνος or ἔθνη without any special sense or characteristics.... **About 60 refer to a people or peoples in the general sense, and of these the following have in view the Jewish people:** Lk. 7:5; 23:2; Jn. 11:48, 50, 51, 52; 18:35; Ac. 10:22; 24:2, 10, 17; 26:4; 28:19; 1 Pt. 2:9. That the Jewish people is meant in the same sense as others, with no particular distinction, may be seen from the various contexts.... **That the expression ἔθνη refers to all nations may be seen from the addition of πάντα [all] in Mt. 24:9, 14; 25:32; 28:19; Mk. 11:17; 13:10; Lk. 21:24; 24:47; Ro. 15:11; Gl. 3:8.**⁹

In the foregoing quotation from the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, some of the passages that are applied to “the Jewish people” are inclusive of all twelve tribes, indicating that the word “*ethnos*” sometimes describes both Judahites and Israelites.

THE WORD *ETHNOS*
SOMETIMES DESCRIBES BOTH
JUDAHITES AND ISRAELITES.

It is no different in the Old Testament. “*Goy*,” the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word “*ethnos*,” is used in identical fashion. Consider the following definition for “*goy*” from *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon*:

.1. Nation, people ... a. **specif. of descendants of Abraham** ... Gn. 12:2... 17:6...definitely of Israel Ex. 19:6...33:13...Dt. 4:6...of **Israel and Judah as two nations** Ez. 35:10.... c. usually of non-Heb. peoples Ex. 9:24, 34:10 ... esp. of these peoples as heathen: idolatrous Lv. 18:24, 28.¹⁰

The Old Testament *does not* use *goy* exclusively for non-Hebrew peoples. In fact, this lexicon begins by correctly defining the word generically as any nation or people. It then includes three definitions that many Christians completely ignore: *goy* can refer “specif. of descendants of Abraham,” “definitely of Israel” and “of Israel and Judah as two nations.”

Precisely opposite of popular teaching, the Bible provides examples of non-Israelite nations identifying Israelites as *goy* and *goyim*:

Behold I have taught you [the nation of Israel] statutes and judgments.... Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding **in the sight of the [non-Israelite] nations [goyim], which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great [Israelite] nation [goy] is a wise and understanding people.** For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as Yahweh our God is in all things that we call upon him for. Deuteronomy 4:5-7

...**thou** [Mount Seir representing the Edomites] **hast said, These two nations** [two goyim, the houses of Israel and Judah] ... **shall be mine, and we will possess it**.... Ezekiel 35:10

⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, “Ovoç,” *The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979) p. 168.

⁹ Karl Ludwig Schmidt, “Ovoç,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964) Volume II, p. 369.

¹⁰ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, William Gesenius, “7,” *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew-English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979) p. 156.

The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia and *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* correctly define *goy*:

...Goy (or Goi) is rendered “Gentiles” in the AV [Authorized Version] in some 30

“GOY CAN REFER “SPECIF. OF DESCENDANTS OF ABRAHAM,” ‘DEFINTELY OF ISRAEL’ AND ‘OF ISRAEL AND JUDAH AS TWO NATIONS.”

passages, but much more frequently “heathen,” and oftener still, “nation,” ... it, is commonly used for a non-Israelitish people, and thus corresponds to the meaning of “Gentiles.” **It occurs, however, in passages referring to the Israelites,**

as in Gen. 12:2; Deut. 32:28; Josh. 3:17; 4:1; 10:13; 2 Sam. 7:23; Isa. 1:4; Zeph. 2:9...¹¹

...**Sometimes *goy* refers to Israel** (Gen. 12:2; Deut. 32:28; Josh. 3:17; 4:1; 10:13; II Sam.7:23; Isa. 1:4; Zeph. 2:9...)....¹²

Nelson’s New illustrated Bible Dictionary points out that the word “gentiles” is “a term used by [contemporary] Jewish people to refer to foreigners or any other people who were not a part of the Jewish race.”¹³ In other words, the idea that the term “gentiles” exclusively represents non-Jews is simply a Jewish tradition adopted by modern Christianity. While this is true for many of today’s Jews and Christians, *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* and *The Jewish Encyclopedia* admit that in the Bible *goy* simply meant *nation(s)*, and that it was used for both non-Israelites and Israelites alike:

The Hebrew word *goy* (plural *goyim*) means “**nation.**” **In Biblical usage it is applied also to Israel:** “Ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (*goy kadosh*; Ex. 19:6).¹⁴

In the Hebrew of the Bible “goi” and its plural “goyim” originally meant “nation,” and were applied both to Israelites and to non-Israelites (Gen. xii. 2, xvii. 20; Ex. xiii. 3, xxxii. 10; Deut. iv. 7; viii. 9, 14; Num. xiv. 12; Isa. i. 4, ix. 22; Jer. vii. 28).¹⁵

The Jewish Encyclopedia admits that the Hebrew word “*goyim*,” and its English equivalent “gentiles,” changed over time and took on “the sense of ‘non-Jew.’”¹⁶ Nevertheless, in the Bible, *goy* means any nation, be it non-Israelite, Israelite or Judahite.

The Hebrew word “*goy*,” like the Greek word “*ethnos*,” is simply a generic word meaning nation(s) or people(s). The most cogent definition for both words is “a multitude of individuals

¹¹ “Gentiles,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1939) Volume II, p. 1215.

¹² “Gentiles,” *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967) p. 307.

¹³ “Gentiles,” *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995) p. 487.

¹⁴ “Gentiles,” *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1941) Volume 4, p. 533.

¹⁵ “Gentile,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1905) Volume V, p. 615.

¹⁶ “Mm (p1. Minim),” *The Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1905) Volume VIII, p. 594.

from the same nature or genus.”¹⁷ Nations is the best translation of “*goy*” and “*ethnos*.” Both words should have been translated in this manner throughout the Old and New Testaments, permitting the context of each passage to determine which nation(s) were being referred to. Had they been consistently translated nation(s), much of today’s confusion concerning the gentiles would have never occurred. The translators’ inconsistency in their renditions of “*goy*” and “*ethnos*” has contributed to flawed theology concerning these words and their biblical, eschatological and contemporary applications.

GOY MEANS ANY NATION,
BE IT NON-ISRAELITE,
ISRAELITE OR JUDAHITE.

People are often heard speaking of an individual as being a gentile. This is another improper use of the term. Because both “*goy*” and “*ethnos*” are collective nouns, neither word can be used to identify an individual. The Bible always uses these terms to identify numerous nations or a nation composed of many individuals.

With this information so readily available from both the Bible and the lexicons, why is it that many preachers and theologians continue to teach otherwise? At best, they have not taken the initiative to investigate this subject. At worst, they are similar to the leaders described in Ezekiel 22:25: “There is a conspiracy of her [the land’s] prophets ... they have taken the treasure and the precious things,” giving them away to people to whom they do not belong.

Understanding that *goy* and *ethnos* refer to both non-Israelite and Israelite nations will place you well on your way toward solving the mystery of the gentiles.

¹⁷ Joseph Henry Thayer, “iOvoç,” The New Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1979) p. 168.