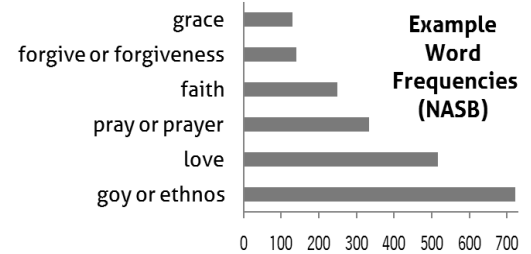


What does the **BIBLE Say** about **ETHNIC RELATIONS?**

INTRODUCTION

Many people are surprised to learn how often the Bible talks about ethnic groups and "ethnic relations" (i.e. how people of different ethnicities should view and treat one another). If we look at the Bible in its original languages we find that the Hebrew word **goy** and the Greek word **ethnos** were used very frequently. These two words are typically translated into English as "nations" or "Gentiles" but their meaning was very close to our modern understanding of "ethnic groups". The following are a few of the many passages that teach us about God's heart for ethnic relations and people of all ethnic groups. Some of the verses contain **goy** or **ethnos** (the words are highlighted) and others teach principles that have direct implications for ethnic relations. All references are in the New International Version.



OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis 22:17-18 I will surely bless you (Abraham) and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations (**goy**) on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

Deuteronomy 10:17-19 For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

Deuteronomy 24:17-19 Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.

Isaiah 11:10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples (**goy**); the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.

Isaiah 56:7b Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations."

Zechariah 2:10-11 "Shout and be glad, O Daughter of Zion. For I am coming, and I will live among you," declares the LORD. "Many nations (**goy**) will be joined with the LORD in that day and will become my people. I will live among you and you will know that the LORD Almighty has sent me to you.

NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Matthew 22:35-40 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" Jesus replied: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Matthew 28:18-20 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (**ethnos**), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Mark 11:17 And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: "'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations (**ethnos**)'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.'"

John 4 *Jesus speaks to the Samaritan woman at the well and ...* **4:39-41** Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

John 10:14-16 "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me-- just as the Father knows me and I know the Father-- and I lay down my life for the sheep. I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd.

John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 17:20-23 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Acts 2:1-6 When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation (**ethnos**) under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.

Acts 2:42-47 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Acts 6 *The first recorded ethnicity-related conflict in the early church. Grecian widows were being overlooked in the distribution of food. The leaders quickly found a solution and maintain unity. As a result...* **6:7** So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

Acts 8 *Philip followed Jesus' example and ministered among the Samaritans and many believed (v.12). Peter and John welcomed them into the church (v.14-17). Then Philip is led by an angel to share the gospel with an Ethiopian eunuch who is saved. (v.26)*

Acts 10 *God revealed to Peter that all ethnic groups are to be welcomed. Peter shares the gospel with the Roman Cornelius and his family.* **10:34-35** Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation (**ethnos**) who fear him and do what is right.

Acts 11:19-21 Now those who had been scattered by the persecution in connection with Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, telling the message only to Jews. Some of them, however, men from Cyprus and Cyrene, went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was with them, and a great number of people believed and turned to the Lord.

Acts 13 *It was an ethnically diverse group of leaders who sent Barnabas and Saul on their first missionary journey.* **13:1-3** In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Acts 15 *A "sharp dispute and debate" (v.2) arises in the early church over whether Gentile converts must follow the Mosaic Law. The Holy Spirit helps the leaders to reach a compromise that allows the ethnic groups to maintain their cultural values and still maintain unity (v.31).*

1 Corinthians 8 *An ethnicity-related conflict arises among the early Christians in regard to eating meat sacrificed to idols. Paul explains how much he is willing to sacrifice for his fellow Believers.* **8:13** Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall.

1 Corinthians 12:24b-26 But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body,

but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Galatians 2:11-14 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles (**ethnos**). But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles (**ethnos**) because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile (**ethnos**) and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles (**ethnos**) to follow Jewish customs?"

Ephesians 1-3 *One of the Bible's clearest descriptions of the gospel and its implications for our relationships with one another. A few highlights...* **1:7-10** In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. **2:13-19** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, **3:4-6** In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and

prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles (**ethnos**) are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 2:1-4 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

James 2:1-4 My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

James 3:16-18 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation (**ethnos**), a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

1 John 3:16-18 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

Revelation 7:9-10 After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation (**ethnos**), tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."