Kingdom Bible Studies

LESSON 2

WHO'S WHO?

UNDERSTANDING WORD MEANINGS

An accurate understanding of word meanings is essential for interpreting the Scriptures. Much confusion exists within Christendom today due to the lack of accuracy on the part of both translators and Bible students with respect to the meanings and usages of <u>key words</u>. In lesson one we examined several such "key" words. We are now ready to look at another misused and misunderstood key word: **Gentile**.
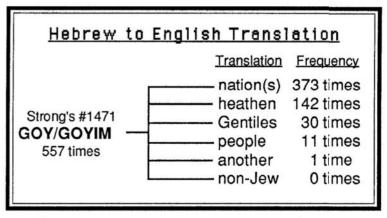
GENTILE

The word **Gentile** means different things to different people. To some, the word means "non-Jew." To others, it means a "Christian." Still others feel it means "heathen" or "non-Christian." They can't all be right. Just what does **Gentile** mean when it is used in Bible passages? What did Paul mean when he said, "..from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6)?

In this lesson we will examine the meanings and usages of the Hebrew word **goy**, and the Greek words **ethnos** and **Hellen**: <u>the words from which the English word **Gentile** was translated</u>. The proper use of these words will alleviate confusion and equip the saints to use the Word of God more effectively.

Modern Definition

gen·tile (jen′tīl; *for adj.* 4 & 5, *usually* jen′til), *n.* [< Fr. & L.; Fr. *gentil;* L. *gentilis,* of the same gens, clan, or race; also, foreigner (in opposition to Roman), pagan, heathen (in opposition to Jew and Christian); see GENTILE], 1. any person not a Jew. 2. formerly, among Christians, a heathen; pagan. 3. among Mormons, any person not a Mormon. *adj.* 1. not Jewish. 2. heathen; pagan. 3. not Mormon. 4. of a clan, tribe, people, or nation. 5. in *grammar,* designating a nationality or country: as, French is a *gentile* word. Also [G-] for *n.* & *adj.* 1 & 3. —*SYN.* see pagan.

**Webster's New World
Dictionary (1966)**

Old Testament Usage

In the Old Testament the word **Gentile** is translated from <u>one</u> Hebrew word that is rendered into English in <u>five</u> different ways. The Hebrew word **goy** or **goyim** (plural), # 1471 in <u>Strong's Concordance</u>, is found in the Old Testament 557 times. The different English renderings of this Hebrew word, and the number of times it appears, is illustrated by the diagram at the right.

Hebrew to English Translation

Strong's #1471
GOY/GOYIM
557 times

Translation	Frequency
nation(s)	373 times
heathen	142 times
Gentiles	30 times
people	11 times
another	1 time
non-Jew	0 times

Inconsistency in translation is partly responsible for the confusion and misunderstanding which exists within Christendom. Such discord in translation must be identified and corrected if an accurate understanding of Scripture is to be attained. Let us now look at a number of Scripture passages that illustrate translation inconsistency.

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. Look at the breakdown given in the diagram on page one. What is the most common English translation for the Hebrew word **goy**? _____

2. How often was this English word used? _____ times.

3. How many times was the Hebrew word **goy** translated into "non-Jew?" _____ times.

4. Using your Strong's Concordance, where is the first place the word **Gentiles** is used in the King James Version Bible? _____

5. What Hebrew word is **Gentiles** translated from? _____

6. In this same verse, what Hebrew word is translated as "nations?" _____

Even though the Hebrew **goy** was never translated as "non-Jew," virtually all modern dictionaries define **Gentile** this way. In Genesis 10:5 notice the same Hebrew word was inconsistently translated into two different English words in the same verse.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Isaiah 11:10-12.
7. In verse 10, the Hebrew word **goy/goyim** is translated into the word _____

8. In verse 12, the Hebrew word **goy/goyim** is translated into the word _____

Read Hosea 8:8-10.
9. In verse 8, the word **Gentiles** is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

10. In verse 10, the word **nations** is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

Read Psalms 9.
11. In verses 5, 15, and 19 the Hebrew word **goy/goyim** is translated into _____

12. In verses 17 and 20, the Hebrew word **goy/goyim** is translated into _____

Read Ezekiel 12:15-16.
13. The word **nations** in verse 15 is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

14. In verse 16, the word **heathen** is rendered from what Hebrew word? _____

Again we see in the above Scripture verses that the same word was used in the original Hebrew text, but three different English words were used in the translation. Such inconsistency can cause confusion.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read chapter 3 of Joel.
1. In verse 2, who does God say He will gather and bring to the valley of Jehoshaphat?
   _____

2. This word is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

3. In verse 12, who is it that comes to the valley of Jehoshaphat to be judged? _____

4. This word is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

5. What are these same people called in verse 9? _____

6. This word is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

7. Notice verse 8. The word **people** is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

Even though the Hebrew word **goy** was never translated as "non-Jew," virtually all modern dictionaries define **Gentile** this way. In Genesis 10:5 notice the same Hebrew word was inconsistently translated into two different English words in the same verse. The Hebrew word **goy/goyim** appears seven times in the third chapter of Joel and is translated into four different English words.

The preceding Scripture passages are good examples of the variety of ways the translators rendered the Hebrew word **goy**. Sometimes they used the word **Gentiles** while at other times they used the words **nation(s)**, **heathen** or **people**. Go back to each Scripture cite and try substituting the words **Gentiles** or **heathen** each time and see what happens. The words **Gentiles** and **heathen** do not provide the consistency and accuracy that the word **nation(s)** does. Every place the the Hebrew word **goy** was used, the English word **nation(s)** could have been used, thus eliminating confusion. You may want to change this word in your King James Bible, thus making it a more accurate translation.

An even better example of the problem with treating the words **goy**, **nation**, **Gentile** and **heathen** as synonymous is found in the twenty-fifth chapter of Genesis.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Genesis 25:19-26
8. In verse 23 we read: "Two _____ are in thy womb.."

9. This word is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

10. Try substituting **Gentiles** or **heathen** in verse 23. Do you think **nations, heathen and "Gentiles"** are synonymous? ____ Yes ____ No

In this example the translators elected to use the correct word **nations**, for obvious reasons. If they had rendered it **Gentiles**, then these two unborn **goyim** (Jacob and Esau), twin grandsons of Abraham and sons of Isaac, would have become two Gentiles in the womb of Rebekah, the mother of Israel: a sensational paradox for anyone who holds that Gentiles cannot be Hebrews. **Heathen** would have been an equally absurd translation.

A few additional examples follow of how inappropriate the use of **Gentiles** or **heathen** would have been in translating the Hebrew word **goy**.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Genesis 12:1-3.
1. In verse 2, the word **nation** is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

2. Would it have made any sense for God to bless Abram (Abraham) by making him a great **Gentile** or a great **heathen**? _____ (Note: See also Genesis 17:1-7.)

Read Genesis 46:1-3.
3. In verse 3 the word **nation** is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

4. Would it be logical for God to make Israel a great **Gentile** or **heathen**? _____

Read Exodus 19:1-6.
5. In verse 6 the word **nation** is translated from what Hebrew word? _____

6. Is there any way that God would have told Israel that He would make her a holy **Gentile** or **heathen**? _____

Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament defines "goy" as: "A people." It also notes that "The word is general, and used of the nations at large, and also of the Israelites." Thus, the Hebrew word **goy** or **goyim** means "nation(s)" or "people" and can refer to Israelite or non-Israelite nations. **Goy** does not specify race. The term could be used with any race or races. Comparing this with the Strong's Concordance definition of **goy** (#1471): "*a foreign nation; hence a Gentile,*" a discrepancy is apparent. We have already examined examples which show that **goy** does not always refer to a foreign nation; thus, the Strong's definition is misleading. **Goy** can mean a foreign nation, but many times it refers to Israel. The context within which the word **goy** is used will determine what nation or nations is meant. With this thought in mind, answer the following questions.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Genesis 10:5.
7. The word **nations** (goy) refers only to which of Noah's descendants? _____

Read Genesis 10:20.
8. The word **nations** (goy) refers only to which of Noah's descendants? _____

Read Genesis 10:31.
9. The word **nations** (goy) refers only to which of Noah's descendants? _____

(Note: In these three examples we see the Hebrew word **goy** used to refer to three separate branches of peoples, two of which are non-Semitic (not from Shem) and non-Israelite.)

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. **Read Genesis 17:4-6.**
   The Hebrew word **goy** is translated as **nations** three different times. In this instance, what family does **nations** refer to? _____

2. **Read Genesis 17:20.**
   The word **nation** (goy) refers to what people? _____
   (Note: None of these people were Israelites.)

3. **Read Genesis 25:23.**
   What two **nations** (goy) are referred to? _____ and_____
   (Note: One became Israelite and the other did not.)

4. **Read Genesis 35:11.**
   The **nation** (goy) and company of **nations** (goyim) refers to what group of people?
   _____
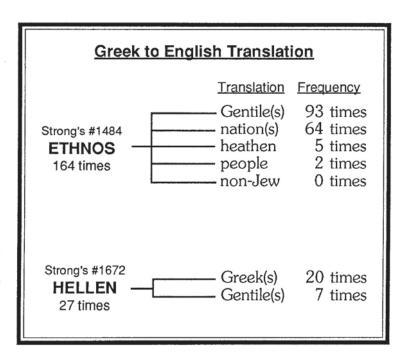   (Note: In this case goy/goyim refers specifically to Israelites only.)

In summary, the Hebrew word **goy/goyim** as used in the Old Testament simply means "nation(s)" or "people(s)." We have seen from a number of Scripture examples that the term can refer to Israelites, non-Israelites or both. We have also examined a number of examples illustrating the inconsistency in translating this Hebrew word, leading to confusion and misunderstanding. The English word **Gentile(s)** in its modern meaning and usage is not generally compatible with the use of the Hebrew word **goy.** Hundreds of years ago the word **Gentile** was understood differently, but unfortunately it has come to mean "non-Jew." Later in this lesson, we will examine the origin and ancient meaning of the word **Gentile**. But first, we will look at the New Testament usages of the Greek words from which **Gentile(s)** is translated.

New Testament Usage

In the New Testament the word **Gentile** is translated from two Greek words (**ethnos** and **Hellen**)that are rendered into English in five different ways. The chart to the right illustrates these various renderings along with their frequency of use. We will examine these two Greek words individually.

Ethnos

In Strong's Concordance the word **ethnos** (#1484) is defined as "..*a race, i.e. a tribe*.." yet not once did the translators use **race** or **tribe**. The word **Gentile** does not appear in this definition, yet that is the word the translators used most often.

Greek to English Translation

	Translation	Frequency
	Gentile(s)	93 times
Strong's #1484	nation(s)	64 times
ETHNOS	heathen	5 times
164 times	people	2 times
	non-Jew	0 times
Strong's #1672	Greek(s)	20 times
HELLEN 27 times	Gentile(s)	7 times

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. <u>Strong's Concordance</u> uses the terms **race** and **tribe** to define what Greek word?
   _____

2. How many times did the translators use these terms when translating **ethnos**? _____

3. What is the most common word the translators used when translating **ethnos**? _____

4. Does this word appear anywhere in <u>Strong's</u> definition of **ethnos**? ____ Yes ____ No

Considering the preceding facts, why did the translators use the word **Gentile(s)** most often when translating the Greek word **ethnos**? We will address that question in a moment. First, let's examine the use of the word **ethnos** in the New Testament. As was the case with the Hebrew word **goy**, the translators were inconsistent in translating the Greek word **ethnos**. Let's look at some examples.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Luke 21:24.
5. The word **nations** is translated from what Greek word? _____

6. In the same verse, the word **Gentiles** is translated from what Greek word? _____

Read Romans 10:19.
7. The word **people** is translated from what Greek word? _____

8. In the same verse, the word **nation** is translated from what Greek word? _____
   (This verse shows that the Greek **ethnos** is comparable to the Hebrew **goy** since Paul is quoting from Deut. 32:21. **Nation** is the correct translation for both **ethnos** and **goy**.)

Read Galatians 2:8-9.
9. The word **Gentiles** is translated from what Greek word? _____

10. The word **heathen** is translated from what Greek word? _____
    (From the context it is obvious the same group of people is being referred to, yet we see two different English words used in the translations.)

In light of the above verses, translation inconsistency is obvious as we see <u>four</u> different English words rendered from the same Greek word without any apparent logical reason. As was the case for the Hebrew word **goy**, the English word **nation(s)** would be the consistently accurate translation for the Greek word **ethnos**. The word **Gentile(s)**, with its modern-day meaning of "non-Jew," simply would not provide a consistently accurate translation (especially in light of the modern-day meaning of "Jew"). Let's consider a few Scripture passages to illustrate this point.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Luke 23:2.

1. Would it make any sense that the Judean leaders would bring Jesus before Pilate and accuse Him of perverting the <u>Gentile</u>? _____ Yes _____ No
(Note: The so-called " Jews" would not have cared if some non-Jews were being perverted.)

Read John 11:48.

2. Would it be logical that the chief priests and Pharisees would be fearful that the Romans would take away their <u>Gentile</u>? _____ Yes _____ No

Read Acts 2:5.

3. Would it be accurate to replace **nation** with <u>Gentile</u>? _____ Yes _____ No
(Note: Modern so-called "Jews" would be outraged with the thought that their "devout" ancestors came out of many <u>Gentile</u> under heaven.)

Read Acts 10:22.

4. Would it have made sense to say that Cornelius was "of good report among all the <u>Gentile</u> of the Jews (Judeans)?" _____ Yes _____ No

As in the case of the Hebrew word **goy**, the Greek word **ethnos** also has general applicability; it can refer to any group of people with the <u>context</u> determining which <u>particular</u> ones. To say that **ethnos** always refers to the same group of people just isn't accurate or honest. The following scriptural examples will illustrate this point.

FIND THE ANSWERS

Read Luke 7:5.

5. What **nation** (ethnos) is referred to? _____
(Note: This event took place in the city of Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee.)

Read John 11:48.

6. What **nation** (ethnos) were the chief priests and Pharisees afraid to lose? _____

Read Acts 4:27.

7. The people of Israel are mentioned as well as other people. What name is given to these other non-Israelites? _____

Read Acts 13:19.

8. What seven **nations** (ethnos) are referred to? (See Deuteronomy 7:1) _____
_____
_____

Read Revelation 15:4.

9. **Nations** (ethnos) is a reference to what kinds of people? _____

Greek to English Translation

Strong's #1672
HELLEN
27 times

Translation	Frequency
Greek(s)	20 times
Gentile(s)	7 times

HELLEN

<u>Strong's Concordance</u> defines this word (#1672) as follows: "*a Hellen (Grecian) or inhabitant of Hellen (Greece); A Greek-speaking person.*"

Hellen

Now we will turn our attention to the second Greek word that was rendered **Gentile** in the New Testament: **Hellen**. Looking at the chart above, we can see that this Greek word was used 27 times in the New Testament and was rendered **Greek** 20 times and **Gentile(s)** 7 times. As was the case with the Greek word **ethnos**, the word **Hellen** was translated inconsistently. A look at several Scriptures will illustrate this point.

FIND THE ANSWERS

1. According to <u>Strong's</u> the Greek word **Hellen** refers to a person of what nation? ___
   _____

2. Romans 1:16 contains the phrase "..*the Jew* (Judean) *first, and also the* _____."

3. This word is translated from what Greek word? _____
   (Note: Paul is distinguishing between Judeans and Greeks.)

4. Verses 9 and 10 of Romans 2 both contain the phrase "..*the Jew* (Judean) *first, and also the* _____."

5. These words in each case are translated from what Greek word? _____
   (Note: Again, Paul is distinguishing between Judeans and Greeks.)

   Note: In the above three verses, the <u>same phrase</u> is used containing the Greek word **Hellen**. However, in the first case the translators used the English word **Greek**, while in the other two verses they used the word **Gentile**.

As you can see from the above verses, the English words **Gentile** and **Greek** were both translated from the same Greek word: **hellen**. Study out the other times **Hellen** #1672) was translated "Gentile" and you will see that the translators should have always rendered it **Greek** instead of substituting, at random, the English word **Gentile**. This apparent inconsistency in translation is the kind of thing that causes confusion in readers' minds. Verses like these are used by some people to suggest that anyone who calls himself a "Jew" has a preeminent place in God's eye while "Gentiles" (so-called non-Jews and Christians) are somehow subordinated. This is faulty reasoning and translating! In the original tongue these verses suggest no such thing.

We have seen that the Greek word **ethnos** means <u>any group of people of the same race or nationality who share a common and distinctive culture</u>. It should have been translated **nation** rather than "Gentile." Also, the Greek word **Hellen** means "Greek" and should have been thus translated instead of "Gentile." Consistency in translation would have prevented confusion. Let us now examine the origin and intended use of the English word **gentile**.

Origin and Intent of "Gentile"

The New Thayers Greek-English Lexicon defines **ethnos** (#1484) as follows: "1. *a multitude associated or living together*. 2. *a multitude of individuals of the same nature or genus*. 3. *race, nation*."

Webster's New World Dictionary, under the word "Gentile," shows that the Latin root word **gentilis** means: "*of the same gens, clan, or race*."

The same dictionary states the following under the words **gens** and **genus**:

gens: "*originally, that belonging together by birth or descent*."

genus: "*birth, origin, race, species, kind, class*."

The English word **gentile** originates from the Latin word **gentilis**. Comparing the meanings given in the box at the left, notice the close similarity between the Latin word **gentilis** and the Greek word **ethnos**. The intent of both words is the same: a group of people sharing a common culture. That could be a family, a group of related families, a tribe or an entire nation. (Note the meanings of the words **gens** and **genus** which were used to explain **ethnos** and **gentilis**.)

The words **ethnos** and **gentilis** themselves do not denote one particular group of people; they could be used for any group or for groups in general. The context in which these words are used may indicate a particular group, but the words themselves are neutral.

The original intent and usage of the English word **gentile** was the same as its Latin root **gentilis**: a group of people related in some way. In this respect, the Old English word **gentile** would have been comparable with the Greek word **ethnos** or the Hebrew word **goy**. This may logically explain why the translators chose to use it in their translating back in the 1600's, even though they did so inconsistently.

However, when one considers the modern concept of the word **gentile**, it becomes obvious that a definite change has taken place in meaning and usage. To say that **gentile** means "non-Jew" (which is the predominant usage today) violates the original meaning and intent of the word and its root. There is absolutely no honest way to apply this modern meaning of "non-Jew" to the Greek word **ethnos** and the Hebrew word **goy** as used in Scripture. Doing so has caused a great amount of confusion and misunderstanding.

Modern "Church" Usage of Gentile

Most so-called "Christian churches" today consider a **Gentile** to be "any person who is not a Jew." Ministers are taught this error at the seminaries, and they pass it on to their church members through sermons, Bible studies and Sunday school classes. Additionally, countless numbers of films, books, tracts and articles are developed espousing this eroneous position. The "modern Gentile" is certainly not the "Gentile" of the Scriptures.

CONCLUSION

So far in this lesson we have examined the meanings and usages of the English word **Gentile(s)** by researching the Hebrew word **goy/goyim** from which it was translated in the Old Testament by the King James translators. We have seen that **Gentile(s)** was only one of several words that were used to translate the same Hebrew word. The same type of inconsistency was found in the New Testament with the Greek words **ethnos** and **Hellen**.

Also, the modern definition of the word **gentile** has changed our people's concept of God, race and nation. It has also corrupted their understanding of Scripture. Most Christians today are victims of error. They've been taught that the people of the world are divided into two exclusive racial categories: 1. Jews and 2. Gentiles. There is not one shred of evidence in the Holy Bible to support that myth. It is error: a false dichotomy that has confused English-speaking Christians for centuries. If you've been taught that you are a "Gentile" and therefore a "Non-Hebrew," you too have been deceived. **Strangely enough, most Christians are racial Hebrews and most so-called "Jews" are not.**

Now that we have seen that the Greek word **ethnos** means "nation(s)" or "people(s)" and should have been translated accordingly, we can turn our attention to what Paul meant in Acts 18:6 when he said, "*..from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles* (ethnos, i.e. nations)." Just who were these people Paul was referring to?

Applying the erroneous modern-day meaning that the "Gentiles" are "non-Jews" to what Paul said, would lead one to believe he was, from that moment on, going to preach the Gospel to non-Israelites only. With this kind of false teaching, it is no wonder that most professing Christians today believe the myth that so-called "Jews" are God's chosen people while they themselves are mere "Gentiles" (non-Israelites).

Also, what did Jesus mean in Acts 9:15 when He said that Paul "*.. is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, ..?*" And, when Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 28:19, "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..,*" who did He refer to as "nations?"

In the next lesson, we will examine who these people were that Paul and the disciples were sent to preach the Gospel to. We will also discover how God's people can be recognized in the world today.

To neutralize Christians, our enemies only need to twist the meanings of key words in our Bibles. The prudent Bible student will carefully research and examine these words, especially when establishing doctrine. That is exactly what these lessons are designed to help you do. (II Timothy 2:15, "*Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing* (discerning) *the word of truth.*"

Notes:

Kingdom Bible Studies

LESSON 2

WHO'S WHO?

Page 12

1. Nation(s)
2. 373 times out of 557 occurances (67% of the time)
3. Never
4. Genesis 10:5
5. Goy/goyim (#1471)
6. Goy/goyim (#1471)
7. Goy/goyim (#1471)
8. Goy/goyim (#1471)
9. Goy/goyim (#1471)
10. Goy/goyim (#1471)
11. Goy/goyim (#1471)
12. Goy/goyim (#1471)
13. Goy/goyim (#1471)
14. Goy/goyim (#1471)

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1. Nations
2. Goy/goyim (#1471)
3. Heathen
4. Goy/goyim (#1471)
5. Gentiles
6. Goy/goyim (#1471)
7. Goy/goyim (#1471)
8. Nations
9. Goy/goyim (#1471)
10. No

Page 14

1. Goy (#1471)
2. Of course not
3. Goy (#1471)
4. Of course not

Page 14 (cont.)

5. Goy (#1471)
6. Of course not
7. Descendants of Japheth
8. Descendants of Ham
9. Descendants of Shem

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1. Descendants of Abraham
2. Descendants of Ishmael
3. Descendants of Esau (Edomites) and descendants of Jacob (Israel)
4. Descendants of Jacob (Israelites)

Page 16

1. Ethnos (#1484)
2. Never
3. Gentile(s) 93 times out of 164 occurances, or 57% of the time
4. No
5. Ethnos (#1484)
6. Ethnos (#1484)
7. Ethnos (#1484)
8. Ethnos (#1484)
9. Ethnos (#1484)
10. Ethnos (#1484)

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1. No
2. No
3. No
4. No
5. Galilee
6. Judea
7. Gentiles (ethnos)
8. The Hittites, Gergasites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and the Jebusites (all of these were non-Israelite nations)
9. All different kinds (including Israelites)

Page 17 (cont.)

Note: The Scriptures in questions 5 and 6 show that the Greek word **ethnos** (usually translated "Gentile") was used to refer to two separate <u>Israelite</u> nations (Galilee and Judea). The Scriptures in 7 and 8 use **ethnos** to refer to <u>non-Israelite</u> nations , while the scripture in question 9 uses **ethnos** to mean all kinds of peoples (including Israelites).

Page 18

1. Greece
2. Greek
3. Hellen (#1672)
4. Gentile
5. Hellen (#1672)

Notes: