THE UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)

#03-09156   ***The Fullness of the Nations #1***   August 26, 2009
[Ethnos]

For those who study the Bible, it is apparent that translators of Scripture often inject their own bias into the text by using certain words over other ones. I call this **interpretative bias**. For this reason, in my studies, I often refer to versions that attempt to be as literal as possible in their translation. In this regard, I often use translations like the Concordant Version or Young's Literal Translation. Since all translations are the work of men, none are perfect and interpretative bias is inherent in practically all; however, some have less bias than others. I prefer translations that simply present words without bias, which, in turn, allows me to determine the meaning or application of words according to the context and not the translator's opinion.

Bias is most readily seen in the way certain Hebrew or Greek words are translated. In issue #03-09131, June 15, 2009, *Eon (Age), Not Eternal or World*, I point out the bias in translating the words *olam* and *aion* as eternal or world rather than as eon or age.

The Hebrew word *goy* and the Greek word *ethnos* fall into the same category as *olam* and *aion*. The proper translation of the words *goy* and *ethnos* is the word *nation*; however, at times, they are translated using the words *Gentile* or *heathen*, which injects the concept of a people that are not Jewish or not of the nation of Israel. Unfortunately, the word *Gentile* injects interpretative bias.

This bias can be seen in the way Strong's Concordance defines these two words.

> *Goy* is "a foreign *nation*; hence a *Gentile*; also (figuratively) a *troop* of animals, or a *flight* of locusts: - Gentile, heathen, nation, people."

> *Ethnos* is "a *race* (as of the same *habit*), that is, a *tribe*; specifically a *foreign* (*non-Jewish*) one (usually by implication *pagan*): - Gentile, heathen, nation, people."

Notice how Strong's relates these words to a foreign or non-Jewish tribe. But this raises a very important question: Is not Israel also a nation, an ethnos? The answer is yes, it most certainly is. In the original languages, Israel is referred to as a goy and an ethnos.

The first mention of the word *goy* or *nation* is found in the book of beginnings.

(5) The coasts of the nations [goy] **were divided by these in their lands each by his tongue, by their families, in their nations** [goy]**. ... (31) These were the sons of Shem, according to their families, according to their tongues, in their lands, according to their nations** [goy]**.** (Genesis 10:5, 31 LITV)

Genesis 10 recounts the generations of the sons of Noah, and all of them are referred to as being divided into their nations. However, the King James uses the word *Gentiles* instead of nations, but how could it be stated that Noah's descendants were foreign non-Jewish nations when they actually represented the totality of all nations in that day? To add to the confusion, the KJV uses the words *Gentiles* and *nations* for the word *goy* in the same sentence: **By these were the isles of the Gentiles** [goy] **divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations** [goy] (Genesis 10:5 KJV).

One could argue that the Jews came from the line of Shem and therefore should be referred to as nations and not Gentiles. But the King James adds further confusion by referring to the sons of Japheth as Gentiles and the sons of Ham as nations. This makes no sense. We have to conclude that the use of

the word *Gentile* is obviously interpretative bias to establish that all that have descended from the line of Japheth are foreign non-Jews. Are we to assume that those of the line of Ham are Jews? Strange!

Turning to Abraham, we discover the use of the word *goy*.

(12:2) And I will make you a great nation [goy]**, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and so you shall be a blessing.... (18:18) And Abraham shall become a great and powerful nation** [goy]**, and all the nations** [goy] **of the earth shall be blessed in him?** (Genesis 12:2; 18:18 NASB)

And the Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the nations [goy] [KJV = heathen] **by faith, preached the gospel before to Abraham: "All the nations** [goy] [KJV = nations] **will be blessed in you."** Gen. 12:3 (Galatians 3:8 LITV)

That the blessing of Abraham might be to the nations [goy] [KJV = Gentiles] **in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.** (Galatians 3:14 LITV)

Hebrew words of the Old Testament often define Greek words of the New Testament, and the word *goy* is a good example of a word that does just that, for it defines the Greek word *ethnos*, as noted in the above. But notice how the KJV injects its bias by using the words *heathen* and *Gentile*.

All the nations will be blessed in Abraham, whether one labels them Jewish or non-Jewish, heathen or Gentile. It matters not what label or descriptor one places on a community of people united under one government; they are all nations destined to be justified by God through the same faith exhibited by Abraham. The blessing of Abraham is for all nations.

Consequently, defining one nation as *Gentile* or *heathen* and another as *Jewish* is not necessary when translating the words *goy* and *ethnos*. By studying the context around the use of these words, one can discern if they are, in fact, referring to the ancient nation of Israel or not.

Besides, Israel is referred to as a nation (goy, ethnos) just like all the other nations of the world, both past and present.

In His disgust over the rebellion of the sons of Israel, the Lord told Moses that He would destroy them and make Moses into a great nation [goy].

"I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation [goy] **greater and mightier than they."** (Numbers 14:12 NASB)

As Jesus walked among the Judahites, the chief priests and the Pharisees convened a council and questioned what to do with Jesus. They feared that if Jesus established the kingdom in their day, they would lose their place of honor and control over the people.

"If we let Him go on like this, all men will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation [ethnos]**."** (John 11:48 NASB)

In other words, the Judahites of that day saw themselves as a nation, an ethnos.

With these few verses, it is apparent that translators do us a disservice by injecting their bias into words. As presented, it is best to translate the words *goy* and *ethnos* as *nation(s)* and allow the reader to decide what nation(s) is in view based on the context.

In the next issue, we will look at Romans 11 and Paul's use of the word *ethnos* in relation to Israel.

(25) For I do not wish you to be ignorant, brethren, of this secret—that ye may not be wise in your own conceits—that hardness in part to Israel hath happened till the fulness of the <u>nations</u> [ethnos] **may come in; (26) and so all Israel shall be saved....** (Romans 11:25-26 YLT)