

# THREE CLASSIFICATIONS OF GENTILES

Both the B'rit Hadashah (Re-Newed Testament) and the Tenakh (Old Testament) have three classifications of Gentiles (Goyim).

1. The **first type** of Gentile (Goy) is called the "heathen", or the pagan. These people worshipped and served others gods.



2. The **next type** of Gentile was God fearers. This would have been a Gentile who forsook his paganism and worshipped the God of Israel. Many of the Yahveh fearers were Torah observant to some degree, and worshipped in the synagogue, but were not circumcised.

3. The **last type** of Gentile is the "proselyte". The proselyte is a Yah fearer who underwent circumcision. Exod. 12:48 says that if the Gentile wants to observe Yah's Passover, then he and all his males must be circumcised. Once the Gentile had been circumcised, he was like a citizen of the land of Israel.

## Paul and Peter talked of fearers of Yah

A classic example of a Yah fearer is Cornelius. Cornelius was a "God fearing Gentile" who was circumcised, that's why Peter went to Him after His vision. **Acts 10:2** says, "He was a devout man, a **'God fearer,'** as his whole household; he gave generously to help the Jewish poor and prayed regularly to Yah."

## EARLY GENTILES

To confirm if the Gentiles knew and practiced the Law before they were saved, one needs to look to the book of Acts. The term "Galatia" is NOT referring to a particular town or city. The term "Galatia" is used to describe a region or an area (common day Turkey). In the province of Galatia there were numerous towns, with both Jews and Gentiles living there. It was on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) that he evangelized the people of Galatia. Let's now look at Acts to see if the Galatians knew about the Torah. **Acts 13:14-16** "But going on from Perga, they arrived at Pisidian Antioch, and on the **Sabbath day** they went into the synagogue and sat down. And after the reading of the Law and the Prophets the synagogue officials sent to them, saying, "Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it." And Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand,

he said, "Men of Israel, and you **who fear God, listen:**" **Acts 13:26** also says, "Brethren, sons of Abraham's family, and **those among you who fear God, to us the word of this salvation is sent out.**"

One group of Gentiles of an undetermined size, were apart of the redeemed community by virtue of the fact that they lived among the others and were required to follow the laws of the community. These people were not partakers of the covenant with Abraham, nor of the covenant with Moses. Although physically redeemed from slavery in Egypt, they did not trust in Elohim for righteousness. They simply adhered to some of the statutes of the Mosaic covenant for their own protection, under the blanket of Believers around them. They felt protected in the community of covenant keepers and perhaps wanted the best of both worlds, like many people of this age.

**Acts 15:19-21** "Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to Yah from among the Gentiles, but that we write to them **that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood.**" Most of the Jewish Believers at that time had been raised with the Torah, they knew it quite well. The Gentiles knew about it, but most were not very familiar with its teaching, so the teachers at that time tried to make the Gentiles feel more comfortable with the community of Jewish believers, by telling them that they needed to start somewhere to learn about the Torah. They were trying to make them feel comfortable, yet trying to get them to understand that in order to commune with the Jews, they would have to at least do something about some obvious unbiblical acts that the Gentiles were participating in. The leaders were trying to tell them that they were welcome to listen and learn about the Torah with the Jewish community as a whole, but they needed to make some fundamental changes in their lifestyle before the Jewish people would consider adopting them. They were saying that as the Gentiles were coming in as babes, they needed to adhere to some basic Torah principals in order to learn, walk, and commune with the oracles of Yah. They meant that if the Gentiles would do some basic changing, they would consider having Torah teachers come into their midst and teach them the instructions of their God. The starting point that is being suggested here is for those Gentiles to at least abstain from "things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from blood."

Here James is not saying that these four things are all that's required of Gentiles. He was not saying that these were the only things the Gentiles needed to concern themselves with. James didn't mention: murder, stealing, adultery, coveting, lying, dis-honoring parents, blaspheming Yah's name, or loving ones neighbor as ones self, etc.. He was just mentioning four specific things that He felt should be discussed in His letter. James knew that the letters of Moses were known throughout the nation and well known to everyone. They didn't need repeating in an official decree from Jerusalem. These four areas were four areas James thought were most likely to cause problems with the Gentiles. If you look closely you will see that the order of these four things: **1) things polluted by idols. 2) sexual immorality. 3) things strangled. 4) blood,** is different from the original order of Lev. 17 and 18. When the actual letter went out to the churches in Acts 15:28-29, the order was changed because it was officially from the elders and apostles. James, in fact, was just reciting these four things from memory, and got the order mixed up. He was not trying to proclaim some new ruling that supposedly would change the laws of Yah in regards to the Gentiles. What authority would He or anyone else for that matter have to do such a thing?

The four prohibitions listed find a commonality in idol worship in the pagan temples. These four items given to the Gentiles are a unified group identifying idol worship in pagan temples. When we speak of pagan temples and their rituals, we must remember that these pagan temples were seen as cultural and social institutions and not merely as religious ones. For instance, local pagan temples often served as banks for individuals as well as the state, and were the locations for all manner of political issues. Gentiles who had been born and raised in the idolatrous cultures of Greece and Rome had a great many aspects of family and community tied together with the local temples. Could a believing Gentile continue to participate at these temples and even join in political, family, and community events without actually participating in idolatry was the big question? Could they eat there without giving their allegiance to the god or goddess to whom the meal was dedicated was another big question the Gentiles had to face?



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David Stern explains it eloquently as follows: These specific instructions were primarily practical social requirements for fellowship between Jewish and gentile Believers. A gentile who did not immediately observe all four prohibitions would so offend his Jewish brothers in the faith that a spirit of community would never be able to develop.

This understanding carries more weight when we realize how important "table fellowship" has been throughout the history of the Near East, including this present day. The deepest and longest-lasting relationships were formed sitting around a table eating a common meal. This was, undoubtedly, when the best fellowship took place among the Believers. Because of this, the Messianic leaders wanted to do all they could to foster the best possible fellowship between two groups of people who traditionally had been suspicious of and antagonistic toward each other.

Therefore, given the great difficulties that existed in establishing essential table fellowship between Jewish and gentile Believers, it was necessary that some of the first Torah instructions given to the former pagans were those which were conducive to establishing fellowship with their new Jewish brothers and sisters."

The wise elders of those days were saying it this way: "You are our equals in the body of Messiah. Our teachings are your teachings. It will take some time, however, for you to begin to understand the Torah. For now, you need only concern yourselves with what will best facilitate fellowship between you and your Jewish brothers and sisters. You will gradually learn more of what it means to walk with Yahveh. We will send qualified men to teach you the Torah".

In conclusion, far from minimizing the role of Torah in the life of non-Jewish Believers, Acts 15 provides ample encouragement for them to continue in the Torah and learn it at their own pace.

## FOREIGNER/STRANGER/ALIEN

The Torah uses such words as "**foreigner**," "**stranger**," and "**alien**," to describe the Gentiles who joined themselves to the Holy One of Israel. The Torah is not exclusively for the Jews. Notice the words: foreigner, stranger and alien in the following scriptures:

Look at some of the provisions the Torah makes for Foreigners and Gentiles. Gentiles can and should observe Passover, plus Gentiles can and should also observe Yah's Sabbath too. **Exod. 20:8-10** "*Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day to Adonai Yahveh. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the **foreigner** (Gentile) within your gates.*"

The Torah says the Gentile is to observe Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). **Lev. 16:29** says, *"It is to be a everlasting regulation for you that on the tenth day of the seventh month you are to deny yourselves and not do any kind of ordinary work, both the citizen and the **foreigner** (Gentile) living with you."*

Deut. 16:9-15 also says the Gentile (foreigner) is to observe Yah's Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles) and Shavuot (Weeks, also called Pentecost).

The Gentile was included in Yah's times of rejoicing and festivals with the people of Israel. The Torah also made other provisions for the Gentile. **Exod. 22:21** says that the **foreigner** is not to be wronged or oppressed. *"And **you shall not wrong a stranger** or oppress him, **for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.**"*

#### **Why did Yah look after the foreigner?**

Remember that the Israelites were once foreigners in a strange land (Egypt). **Num. 15:16** it says, *"The same Torah and standard of judgment will apply to both you and the **foreigner** (Gentile) living with you."* It is important to note that Yah didn't give one Torah to the Jews and another Torah just for the Gentiles. Yah gave one Torah to both Jews and Gentiles.

**Eph. 2:12a** says, *"at that time (you) had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Israel. You were **foreigners** to the covenants..."*

**Eph. 2:19** says, *"So then, **you are no longer foreigners and strangers.** On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with Yah's people and members of Yah's family."*

DASYD MINISTRY "DO AS YESHUA DID" dasydministry.org Jerry Hennig (Sept/21)  
excerpt from Law Book.