

Two Gentiles

The term "Gentiles" means "Nations". When God chose Israel as His special people then all others fell into the category of Gentiles. Although the term is sometimes used negatively to refer to the worldly and pagan members of these nations (1 Peter 4:3 *For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the **Gentiles**, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries:*), not all Gentiles were wicked. Acts 10:1-2 *There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.*

Usually we hear about the Gentiles when they come in contact with Israel in the Old Testament. The Egyptians become a big part of the Bible story when they oppressed Israel. The Canaanites held the land God promised to give to Abraham's descendants. We meet Ruth because a Jewish family moved to Moab. We learn about Assyria and Babylon because they conquered the nations of Israel and Judah during the period of the divided kingdom. Through Israel the Gentiles learn of God.

There are two individuals who seem to deviate from this pattern. Although we are introduced to them by their contact with Abraham and Israel they obviously have backgrounds with God before this contact takes place.

When Abraham returned from defeating kings who had captured Lot he met a priest. He was not a Levite as they did not yet exist. (Abraham's great grandson was Levi)

Gen 14:18-20 says, "*And **Melchizedek** king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the*

most high God, possessor of heaven and earth: And blessed be the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all." (Abraham gave tithes)

This priest is mentioned one more time in the Old Testament as a type that Jesus will come to reflect. Ps 110:4 *The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.*

The book of Hebrews explains this further (Heb. 7:1-21). This man was a **priest** and **king**, like Jesus. He did not have any priestly **ancestors** before or after him, like Jesus. He was not a **Levite**. Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. He was the king of **Salem** (Jerusalem), a term that means "peace". Jesus is the Lord of peace (2 Thes. 3:6).

The other Gentile was a prophet. His name was **Balaam**. When Israel had defeated a number of nations before crossing the Jordan the king of Moab, Balak, became nervous. Although Moab worshipped Chemosh, the god of war, he felt inadequate to take on this army. Balak contacted Balaam the prophet to come and curse Israel for him.

When the ambassadors of the king asked Balaam to come he enquired of the Lord. Num 22:12 *And God said unto Balaam, **Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed**.* This text reveals he was a true prophet.

Balak sends more noble princes to Balaam with a promise to pay him more. This offer should not have caused the prophet to ask God again. The answer was already given. He could not curse Israel which is what Balak wanted to pay him to do. Why would nobler princes and more money change God's decision?

Num 22:18-20 *And Balaam answered and said unto the servants of Balak, If Balak would give me his house full of silver*

and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the LORD my God, to do less or more. Now therefore, I pray you, tarry ye also here this night, that I may know what the LORD will say unto me more. And God came unto Balaam at night, and said unto him, If the men come to call thee, rise up, and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do.

Most of us are familiar with what happens next. Balaam goes to Moab on his donkey. The animal sees an angel with a sword drawn. He alters his path and frustrates the prophet who is unable to see the angel. After the third time the man begins to beat the animal and God allows the donkey to speak in his own defense. Balaam is so angry he does not seem to notice the miracle but enters into an argument with the donkey. God then allows the prophet to see the angel also.

We might ask why God sought to kill this prophet after He had given him permission to go. The answer seems to be that Balaam was not going to speak only what God told him. He must have had an intention of making the money by cursing Israel after he arrived. 2 Peter 2:15-16 says, "*Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.*"

Although the prophet did obey God in not cursing Israel he still did wrong. He counseled Balak how to get God to curse Israel by influencing them to sin. Again in the New Testament we read, *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication* (Rev 2:14).

We find good and bad people among the Gentiles, the Jews, the modern world, and even in the church. Walk in the way of Melchizedek and not in the way of Balaam. *Ron Roberts*