

## What Does the Bible Say About Race Relations?

The Bible doesn't speak directly about race very often. When it does speak about tribes, nations, or peoples, the message is a theological one rather than anything to do with skin color, physical characteristics, or where someone was born. This author would argue that is because God only recognizes one "race;" the human race. To understand this one must begin at the beginning.

The Bible begins with the story of creation. From the beginning God did not create a special, chosen group of people. He created the first man and first woman "in His image." (Gen. 1:27). Adam and Eve are the ancestors of all who are living today. In fact, in Genesis 3:20, Adam calls Eve "the mother of all living." Therefore, from the beginning all people were one race.

One would expect people of "one race" to all have similar physical characteristics. So why do we see such variation in physical traits among the human race? This can also be explained by the Bible and simple human genetics. In Genesis chapter 11 verse 1 we see that at one time "the whole earth used the same language and the same words" and lived in the same geographical location. The people set about to build a tower that would reach the heavens. This displeased God who said in verse 7, "Come let Us go down and confuse their language so they will not be able to understand each other." Verse 8 says "so the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth." This "scattering" caused genetic isolation among the people who spoke the same language and were scattered to the same geographic location. A basic understanding of genetics indicates that once groups become genetically isolated from one another certain dominant characteristics (phenotypes) within those groups would be "selected" genetically and those phenotypes would become more apparent in that group of people. So, after several generations one would expect to see identifiable features (such as darker or lighter skin color, straighter or curlier hair, so called "Roman" noses, etc.) begin to develop among one group of people who was intermarrying and bearing children because they spoke the same language and lived in the same geographic region. A totally different set of physical characteristics would likely develop among a second group who were intermarrying and bearing children in a different geographic location. This genetic and geographic isolation most likely also accounts for the ethnic and cultural differences seen among groups. Different geographical regions would have different resources that people would adapt for their own use.

God's word is clear that there is only one race. In addition to the verses in Genesis that were previously mentioned, one should consider at least two others (although there are more). Malachi 2:10a says, "We all have the same father; the same God made us." Acts 17:26 says, "God began by making one person and from him came all the different people who live everywhere in the world. God decided exactly when and where they must live." So, as established previously, there can be and are different physical characteristics as well as different ethnic and cultural heritages among people that can be identified, honored, and even celebrated, but from the beginning humans were and still are members of one race created in the image of God.

Although at one time God had a "chosen" people this was a theological "choosing" (in order to bring Christ into the world) rather than a racial one. Even the "chosen" ones, the children of Israel, were commanded to treat the nations around them with respect and dignity. In Leviticus 19:33-34 God commands, "Do not mistreat foreigners living in your country, but treat them just as you treat your own citizens. Love foreigners as you love yourselves, because you were once foreigners in Egypt." Exodus 22: 21 declares "Do not cheat or hurt a foreigner..." Let us not forget that the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament and He expects no less of us today. James 2:9 says, "If you treat one

person as being more important than another, you are sinning. You are guilty of breaking God's law." To mistreat, ridicule, or oppress anyone, no matter their skin color, nationality, or any other characteristic we choose to separate people by is in direct violation of the will of God.

What about those Old Testament commands that the Israelites not intermarry with the nations around them? Do they prove that God recognizes one ethnic group as better than another? Deuteronomy 7:1-4 is one such passage forbidding the Children of Israel from intermarrying with the nations around them. Verse 4 clearly explains the reason for this command and the reason is theological rather than racial. Deuteronomy 7: 4 says "If you do," (allow your children to marry the children of the nations around you) "those people will turn your children away from Me, to begin serving other gods. Then the Lord will be very angry with you, and He will quickly destroy you." An example that the problem is theological and not about race could be the marriage of Moses, one of God's great leaders, to the Cushite woman. (The Cushites were an African tribe with very dark skin.) In Numbers 12:1, Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses "because of his Cushite wife." As the story unfolds in the remainder of chapter 12 we see that God sided with Moses and punished Miriam and Aaron. The necessary inference here is that God did not oppose Moses' marriage to a woman of a different nationality (or "race") as long as she was not a woman who would turn Moses from following Him.

No group of people is any better or any more loved by God than any other. Many scriptures in the New Testament bear this out. This writer will leave you with just two. Romans 10:11-13 says ""anyone who trusts in Him will never be disappointed." That Scripture says "anyone" because there is no difference between those who are Jews and those who are not. The same Lord is the Lord of all and gives many blessings to all who trust in Him, as the Scripture says, "Anyone who calls on the Lord will be saved."" In Acts 10:34-35, Peter declares "I really understand now that to God every person is the same. In every country God accepts anyone who worships Him and does what is right." If God loves and accepts every person, so must we!

On June 25<sup>th</sup> we had corresponding lessons on this topic. Check our website for sermons titled "Race Relations I (Genesis 1:24-31)" from the AM service and "Race Relations II (Matthew 7:1-12)" from the PM service. Also, you can find our worship services on our Facebook page.