

## God's Heart for the Nations 2

**Purpose:** To understand God's heart for all the nations from the beginning to the end of Scripture.

**Objective:** By the end of the lesson the students will:

1. Know what God's heart has always been to reach and bless all the nations.
2. Trust God to develop in them a heart for reaching peoples of all nations with the Gospel of Christ.
3. Take action based on their developing heart for the lost.

**Key Verse:** Matthew 28:19

### I. Introduction

Many of you are familiar with the key verse of this devotional in which Jesus gives the Great Commission to "Go and make disciples of all the nations." You can see Christ's heart for the nations again in Acts 1:8, just before His ascension. Continuing on in the book of Acts, one observes the beginnings of the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

In a previous devotional, we looked at the Old Testament to see what His heart was for the nations in that time period. In this devotional, we'll see how this continued and developed in the New Testament. (*if this was assigned from the previous devotional...*) Did anyone find Scriptures that talk about God's heart for the nations in the New Testament, and how the church responded to Gentiles coming to saving faith? (*Allow students to share what they came up with. If not already mentioned, cover the following...*)

### II. God's Heart for the Nations – New Testament

At the birth of Christ, God's heart for the nations was revealed. (*Have a volunteer read Luke 2:10, and another volunteer read Luke 2:30-32. Ask the class how these verses show God's heart for the nations. If not mentioned, you could say...*) The angel announced to the shepherds, "...I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be **for all the people**: today a Savior, who is Messiah the Lord, was born for you in the city of David..." (Luke 2:10). When the infant Jesus was presented in the temple complex in Jerusalem, a Spirit-filled man named Simeon took Him in his arms and said, "...For my eyes have seen Your salvation, You have prepared it in the presence of all peoples – **a light for revelation to the Gentiles** and glory to Your people Israel" (Luke 2:30-32).

Years later, Jesus' earthly ministry was concentrated on the people of Israel, yet the faith of some Gentiles caught His attention. (*Have a volunteer read Matthew 8:5-13 and another one to read Matthew 15:21-28. Ask the class to comment on what happened and what Jesus taught from each incident. If not mentioned, you could say that He even said that people who are not "of the kingdom" will recline at the table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.*)

*(Ask the class to look at John 10:16 and Ephesians 2:11-22 and discuss if they may somehow be related. Give about 5 minutes. Ask the class to share their thoughts on the two passages. If not mentioned, you could say...)* Jesus said, “I have other sheep that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd.” Perhaps Paul explained this in Ephesians 2:11-22 in which he said that the Gentiles formerly were without God and without hope. **But** now through Christ’s blood, both Jews and Gentiles have been made one and are both reconciled to God through Christ. Gentiles are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens and members of God’s household being built up together with the Jews into one building for God’s dwelling in the Spirit.

It’s interesting to note that when the disciples informed Jesus that some Greeks wanted to see Him, Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” (John 12:20-23). It’s unclear if these Greeks were Hellenistic Jews or Gentiles.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he said that His disciples would be His witnesses to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). This started to unfold in Acts chapter 10 when Peter was called by God to go and share the Gospel with a Gentile. Because of time, we won’t read the whole chapter, but as you look at verse 28 and 29, what issue did Peter have to work through in this story? *(If not mentioned, you could say that it was forbidden for a Jewish man to associate with or visit a foreigner. But God showed him that he must not consider anyone as common or unclean)* Peter preached the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit came upon the Gentiles as He had upon the Jews. What was the reaction of the circumcised believers who came with Peter (verse 45)? *(If not mentioned, you could say they were **astounded** over this!)* Later, apostles and brothers (especially those who stressed circumcision) heard that Peter had visited uncircumcised men and ate with them. How did they respond (Acts 11:1-3)? *(If not mentioned, you could say that they argued with Peter and objected to what he did)* In Acts 11:4-17, Peter responds to them by recounting what happened, and they became silent and replied, “So God has granted repentance resulting in life to even the Gentiles” (Acts 11:18). Perhaps they did not know the Old Testament passages about God’s salvation to the Gentiles, or they knew the passages but didn’t believe them, or they believed the passages but they also believed the Gentiles had to follow the Law of Moses to be saved. It was probably the third option, because this became a point of contention in Acts 15 after Paul and Barnabas had seen many Gentiles come to saving faith in Asia.

Look in Acts 11:19-21. Believers were scattered because of persecution. Many continued speaking the message of Christ. What specific work had the Lord’s hand of blessing? *(If not mentioned, you could say...)* Some Jewish believers still didn’t get the message that God’s salvation is not only for Jews, but also for the Gentiles. Those who preached not only to the Jews but also to non-Jews were blessed by God and many believed and turned to the Lord.

The Holy Spirit called Paul and Barnabas to go to the Gentiles, and many came to faith in Christ (Acts 13 and 14). When news of this spread in the church, some believers were not pleased. Read Acts 15:1-5, and tell us what problem rose up in the church. *(Allow a few minutes for them to read, then ask some to answer. If not mentioned, you could say...)* As was mentioned earlier, this became a point of contention with those who thought it necessary for them to be circumcised and follow the Law of Moses. Paul, who formerly followed the Law of Moses strictly and required others to do so, argued against this. The issue was brought to a council of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (sort of a Christian “supreme court”).

At the Jerusalem Council, what points did Peter make (Acts 15:7-11)? (*If not mentioned, you could say...*) He recounted his experience of Acts chapter 10, and that the Gentiles hearts were cleansed by faith through God's grace and not by the Law of Moses - a law which even the Jews can't keep. What did the council finally agree on (Acts 15:19, 20)? (*If not mentioned, you could say...*) The council agreed that the only "burden" needed to be put on the Gentile believers was to abstain from sexual immorality, things polluted by idols, blood, and strangled meat. This letter was written and read among the churches, which encouraged the Gentile believers (Acts 15:30-32). Case closed, right? Not really.

Many Jews had come to believe, but they were also zealous for the law (Acts 21:17-20). This may have contributed to a riot later in the chapter. In Acts 22:21, 22 the Jews wanted Paul wiped off the face of the earth because he said that God sent him to preach to the Gentiles. In what may be his first letter, Paul wrote to the Galatians, stressing that we are justified by faith and not by the works of the law (Galatians 2:16). He stressed the importance of faith and living by the Spirit and not self effort trying to perform the law.

(*Have a class member read Ephesians 3:3-6, and another read Colossians 1:26, 27. Ask the class to describe what is "the mystery revealed." If not mentioned, you could say...*) Paul talked about "the mystery" revealed which is Christ in the Gentiles and that they are co-heirs, members of the same body and partners of the promise in Christ Jesus.

(*Ask student volunteers to read each of the following passages:*)

*"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals; because You were slaughtered, and You redeemed people for God by Your blood from every tribe and language and people and nation. You made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will reign on the earth." Revelation 5:9,10*

*"After this I looked, and there was a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were robed in white with palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: Salvation belongs to our God, who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" Revelation 7:9,10*

*"The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it." Revelation 21:24*

### **III. Conclusion**

From beginning to the end, God has always had a heart to bless all the nations in Christ. When the church was born in Acts 2, all the members were Jewish. When Gentiles started coming to saving faith and receiving the Holy Spirit, it was difficult for many Jewish Christians to accept. But after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the church continued to grow among the Jews and the Gentiles.

Since it is on God's heart to bless all the nations through Christ, it must also be on your heart. Because this is on God's heart, what part does He want **you** to play in this? Do you pray for the

nations? Are you informed of what God is doing in other parts of the world and how you can pray for this? Do you pray for missionaries overseas? Would God have you help support overseas mission efforts? Perhaps you could serve on the church Missions Committee. Would God have you to go on a mission trip – short term or long term? Are you being a missionary here in your home country? Especially in large cities and near colleges and universities, you will find many people from foreign countries. There is a mission field right in your back yard! Trust the Lord and reach out to many nations without even leaving your home. The opportunities are here. Don't be concerned that you don't know all the customs of various countries. God is not so concerned with your ability as He is with your availability. For tips on reaching out to those of other cultures, see the class session "Ministering Cross-Culturally." *"This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole inhabited earth as a witness to the nations, and then the end will come"* (Matthew 24:14). Will you be a part of the fulfillment of this verse?

Let's close in prayer, committing ourselves to be available to God and to reach and bless the nations with the message of Christ. This is what has always been near and dear to His heart.

*(Close in prayer).*