

A Biblical Explanation & Resource Guide for Caring About Race & Racism like God Does

God created us to be different, but equal, made in his image and adopted as children. We come from the same ancestors and have been given the same mission by God, to fill the earth and be fruitful. But rather than honor our innate human dignity, humans were evil all the time, committing violent acts against each other (Gen. 6). After God wiped out these evil humans in a flood, in Noah's time (Gen. 8), he commanded them, again, to fill the earth (Gen. 9). Instead they built a tower to heaven to be gods themselves (Gen. 11). So God dispersed them saying, "that nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them." God doesn't want a repeat of the flood. He doesn't want one central, homogenous human culture on earth that will become completely wicked (Gen. 6), so he separates them and confuses their languages to force them to fill and subdue the earth and, most importantly, be fruitful.

Not long after, the father of our faith, Abraham (Gen. 12) enters the picture and God promises to make him into a great nation that will bless all peoples on Earth, in other words he will be fruitful. Through Abraham's grandson, Israel, this promise is partially fulfilled as Israel and his sons go to Egypt to join their brother Joseph, who is a high official in the Egyptian kingdom. After Joseph dies, the people of Israel are enslaved and eventually delivered by God so he can make them into their own nation. He gives them laws to separate them from all the other nations so they will live up to a higher standard as image bearers, including treating foreigners as themselves. (Lev. 9 & Ezek. 47).

Fast forward to the prophets (Amos)...Israel has forsaken their covenant with God. One of their biggest sins is oppressing the poor and weak among them, just like the other nations routinely do. Therefore, God uses the very wicked nations they are supposed to influence to enslave them. In other words, He is harder on them than he is on the nations because they bear his name (Isa. 30). Although there is always a remnant of Israelites who follow God (Ezra, Esther, Ruth, Nehemiah), the majority do what any nation in power tends to do, they let their power become oppressive. Therefore, God refuses to talk to them for 400 years after their captivity (Malachi).

Then during Jesus' time, Israel continues failing to bless the nations by rejecting Jesus. They would rather have a king that will rule over the Romans by force. Instead they get a Lord and Savior riding a donkey (Matt. 21). Jesus refuses to turn away non-Jews away from his ministry (Jn. 4). For example, he reserves his greatest compliment, "greatest faith in Israel" for a god-fearing Roman (Matt. 8), a representative of the nation that will only a few decades later enslave and then disperse the Israelites for good. When asked what he came here to do, Jesus simply reads the passage from Isaiah 61 saying "I've come to set the oppressed free."

Although we may like to spiritualize this passage to mean salvation from sin ONLY, Isaiah is talking about the Israelites being set free from Babylon as much as he is talking about letting the oppressed Israelites being set free from their oppressive Israelite officials. Jesus similarly is saying his message will eventually upend any oppressive relationships that don't honor the dignity of God's image bearers.

But this message isn't easily adopted. Jesus' main church builder, Peter, doesn't quite get Jesus' message to make disciples of all nations until God sends him a forceful vision (Acts 10) to accept all people, and even then, he doesn't live out that new reality until Paul confronts him (Gal. 2). Paul tells Peter he must stop showing favoritism if he is to be like Christ, the one who created and now saves all nations (Jam. 2). Paul in a sermon to Gentile philosophers preaches that our differences are and always will be a gift from God that he intended in order for us to seek and find him in different ways and places and at different times (Acts 17), i.e, to fill the earth and be fruitful.

Paul deals with the issues of this new reality at every point in his letters to the churches. Although race, not a very well-defined concept in their day, isn't as big of an issue as religion, wealth, and nationality, we are dealing with the same human categories that separate people and are often the basis for favoritism and oppression. And yet, Paul talks constantly about how God doesn't show favoritism...(Rom. 2). When Paul says that there is neither Jew nor Gentile he doesn't mean anything like our modern notion of 'color-blindness' (Gal. 3 & 1 Cor. 10). Actually, he means quite the opposite - the Gentile doesn't have to conform to the Jewish identity or culture to be in the Kingdom of God. They have a new law, Jesus, a person who models the gospel to the Jews and Gentiles just the same; and Jesus doesn't take into consideration any superiority they may have because of their nationality or identity.

Revelation paints a picture of this reality being fulfilled (Rev. 7), a place where all nations, tribes and people groups come to worship God according to God's character. Heaven will be a place where the rules, traditions, history, and preferences of culture and nationality don't exclude image bearers from a full life and being near to God but rather show off God's goodness and glory through the vast differences of the people he created. In other words we will finally be fruitful and fill the earth, and even the cosmos.

In light of the biblical testimony regarding race, ethnicity, nationality and knowing that as Christians we 'act' out our beliefs in the world around us (James) we must ask some hard questions of ourselves:

1. In what ways do we love our nation more than we love the kingdom of God?
2. In what ways are we helping to free the oppressed?
3. How have we worked in our current time to correct the effects of past oppression?

4. How can we ensure that we don't treat minorities as second-class citizens?
5. How do we invest in minority communities and not simply give aid?
6. In what ways do we blame minorities for issues they experience & lack grace for them?

Resources for Further Study

[1 Our pain is not your classroom](#)

[2 Systemic racism explained](#)

[3. Reflections from a Christian scholar on social justice, critical race theory, marxism, and biblical ethics](#)

[4. As in heaven podcast](#)

5. Reading While Black: African American biblical interpretation as an exercise in hope
[Short video about the book here.](#)