

# What Defines a People Group?

## 1. What did Jesus mean by “make disciples of all the nations”?

The Greek word Jesus used for nation was “ethne” which we get the English word “ethnic” from. Jesus was referring to people groups when He gave this command.

Burkaric Jew in Israel  
Defined by **Ethnicity**  
and **Language**



Yazidi in Iraq  
Defined by  
**Religion** and  
**Language**



## 2. What is a “people group”?

The traditional definition is “For evangelization purposes, a people group is the largest group within which the Gospel can spread as a church planting movement without encountering barriers of understanding or acceptance.”

Dariganga in Mongolia  
Defined by  
**Language**



## 3. Understanding and Acceptance

These are the two main barriers to the spread of the Gospel: understanding (language) and acceptance (ethnicity / religion / culture).

Chukchi in Russia  
Defined by  
**Language**



## 4. The highest barrier?

When defining a people group the key question is “Which barrier(s) is the highest?”

Hui in China  
Defined by  
**Religion**



## 10. What kind of list is Joshua Project?

The Joshua Project people group list is not an academic anthropological list. It defines people groups with the focus of facilitating strategic church planting.

Akan in Ghana  
Defined by  
**Language**



## 9. How people groups are not defined.

People groups are not defined by:

- Occupation: taxi drivers are not a people group.
- Social status: a ruling class in a country is not a people group.
- Economic status: the poor in a country are not considered a people group.



Hausa in Nigeria  
Defined by  
**Language** and  
**Religion**



Jat (Muslim) in Pakistan  
Defined by  
**Caste / Culture**  
and **Religion**



Lodha (Hindu) in India.  
Defined by  
**Caste / Culture**  
and **Religion**

## 5. Four factors when defining people groups:

- Language
- Culture
- Religion
- Geography

These can be in any combination. Typically only one or two of these factors define a people group.



Chhetri in Nepal  
Defined by  
**Caste / Culture**



Duna in Papua New Guinea  
Defined by  
**Language**

## 8. Ethno-what?

- People groups defined by language are usually called “ethno-linguistic” peoples.
- People groups defined by culture / caste / religion are often called “ethno-cultural” peoples.

## 7. Broad Generalizations

While there are exceptions, outside South Asia the highest barrier to the spread of the Gospel is usually language. In South Asia the highest barriers tend to be culture / caste and religion.

## 6. Geography by country

Traditionally mission researchers have classified people groups by country. The current Joshua Project estimate is about **17,015** distinct people groups by country.