

What do you mean by the name “Jews?”

By Dave Ramey

When you think about the Jews, what comes to mind? Race? Religion? Israel? Or what?

Before we can determine the definition of the word “Jews”, we must first examine some history. Anciently, Abraham had a son whom he named “Isaac.” When Isaac married he had a son he named “Jacob.” Then when Jacob had children, he named one of his sons “Judah.” As it turns out, the name “Jew” is just a nickname for Judah, similar to Joe being a nickname for Joseph. So, the name “Jew” comes from Judah, one of Jacob’s sons, and is applied to all of the descendants of Judah.

As for Jacob, God gave him the new name “Israel”, which gave rise to the term “Israelite”, a descendant of Israel. Israel had twelve sons, **ONLY ONE OF WHICH WAS NAMED “JUDAH.”** Needless to say, all Jews are Israelites, but all Israelites are **NOT** Jews. For proof of this, note that the very first time the word “Jew” is used in the Bible that the Jews were warring against the Israelites, which would not be possible if the terms were synonymous. A present day example is that all Californians are Americans, but all Americans are NOT Californians.

By the time of Moses and Joshua, the Israelites, including the Jews, became a large multitude. When they settled in the “Promised Land” they divided the land up by the tribes into 12 “states” each named after the tribe living therein. Judah was the name of the “state” the Jews lived in, Dan was the name of the “state” the Dannites lived in, etc. Because the Levites were a priestly tribe and resided in every “state”, they were not allocated any land. Since all twelve tribes (“states”) were named after the twelve sons of Israel, and these “states” were populated by descendants of Israel (Jacob), the nation itself was known as Israel.

After the death of Solomon, things changed again. Because King Rehoboam would not cut taxes, the northern ten tribes split themselves from the southern two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) and set up a new nation. At that time the northern ten tribes kept the name of Israel while the other two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) became known as Judah, and the inhabitants as Jews. Since the capital of Israel in the north became the city of Samaria, quite often the northern ten tribes were referred to as Samaria and the people as Samaritans. Eventually the Assyrians deported Israel (the northern tribes/kingdom) to Assyria, Media, the Russian Steppes, etc. and then Israel became lost in history. After expelling the Israelites, the Assyrians relocated people from the Assyrian Empire to the vacated land, and by the time of Jesus these people, who were NOT descendants of Israel, became known as Samaritans. Years after the Assyrians conquered Israel, the Babylonians conquered and deported the Jews from the land of Judah, to Babylonia from where a tiny remnant returned to the Promised Land years later.

While the children of Israel were wandering in the wilderness for those 40 long years before entering the Promised Land, God instructed Moses to teach Israel how to worship Him. This system of worship continued off and on until Solomon died. At that time, the northern tribes of Israel, under King Jehoboam rejected this religion in favor of worshipping Baal and other false gods. Judah retained the religion given to Moses, and eventually this religion became known as Judaism and its adherents as Jews. The Levites in Israel that were against the religious change fled south to Judah where they became a major force in religion.

To sum this up we have the following three possibilities:

- **RACE:** Everyone descended from the patriarch Judah is a Jew and is also an Israelite, while NONE of the other descendants of Israel are Jews.
- **NATIONALITY:** Everyone that was a citizen (and all of their descendants) of the ancient nation of Judah (racial Jews, racial Benjaminites, racial Levites, and any immigrants of other races) is a Jew and is also an Israelite, while NONE of the citizens (nor their descendants) of other nations, whether or not racial Israelites, are Jews.
- **RELIGION:** Everyone adhering to the Jewish religion is a Jew, while NONE of the other adherents of any other religion are Jews.

As you can see, the word “Jews” can mean **THREE** different things depending upon whether you are talking about **RACE, NATIONALITY, or RELIGION!** A Jew can be a RACIAL Jew *and* a NATIONAL Jew *and* a RELIGIOUS Jew all at the *SAME* time! Or a Jew can be *only* ONE of these, or *any* TWO. So, be careful how you use and interpret the word “Jew.” People throughout history have confused the THREE definitions and as a result thoroughly confused themselves and others.