

Who are the Jews and are they Yahweh's Chosen People?

By Chris Pope

Most people are familiar with the Jews because of the Holocaust, but it has become very clear lately that most people have no clue about where Jews originated from and who they are exactly. Most people relate Jews with Israel and will tell you that Jews are Yahweh's chosen people and some people even think that Abraham or even Adam were the first Jew. Then you have the Hebrew people...who exactly are they? Are all Jews Hebrew? Are Israelites Jews, Hebrews? This can get quite confusing if you don't have a good understanding of who falls under these different categories of people. My prayer is that by the end of this teaching you will have a deeper understanding of who is who and that you will gain a deeper understanding of Yah's Word.

Who is considered Hebrew and who was the first one?

Right off the bat let's take a look at what the word Hebrew means. Hebrew (עברי) means to transverse or cross over. Simple enough, so who was the first Hebrew or person to cross over? The answer to that question can be found in the Bible. **"One who had escaped came and reported this to Abram the Hebrew" (Genesis 14:13)**. The first person mentioned in the Bible as a "Hebrew" is Abraham. This makes sense considering that Abraham "crossed over" and left the comfort of his home, his country, and his family to follow Yahweh into the wilderness.

"Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Genesis 12).

So, we know that Abraham was Hebrew and most likely he was the first Hebrew. This would make all the descendants of Abraham Hebrews as well. So Isaac, Jacob, King David, and even Y'shua would have been considered Hebrew because they were all descendants of Abraham.

But, I thought Israel was a country in the Middle East...

You are right; Israel is a country in the Middle East, with physical borders and a people that live inside of those borders who call themselves Israelites. Did you also know that Israel is the name of a very important person in the Bible? Most people know him as Jacob, but Yahweh changed his name to Israel.

9Then Yahweh appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him.

10Yahweh said to him, “Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, But Israel shall be your name.” Thus He called him Israel.

When many people see Israel in the Bible they assume it is referring to the country of Israel and this can cause some confusion. When the Bible refers to “the sons of Israel”, it is literally talking about Jacobs’s twelve sons and their descendants. Now that we know that Israel is Jacob it should become easier to understand certain scriptures and give us a better understanding of the bigger picture that is going on in the Bible. This also reveals to us who the Israelites are. Jacob/Israel’s twelve sons were the first Israelites and their descendants would also be considered Israelites. Many, many years after the death of Jacob/Israel, when all of his twelve sons had multiplied greatly and had become a multitude of people, they started being referred to as just Israel and not the sons of Israel.

Now we know that all of Abraham’s descendants are Hebrew and all of Jacob’s descendants are Israelites, but Abraham wasn’t an Israelite.

OK, but they were all Jewish right?

No, they weren’t all Jewish. In fact, only 1/12 of Israel was Jewish. All twelve tribes/sons of Israel/Jacob make up the Israeli people, but there was only one tribe that would have been considered Jews. So where exactly did the Jews come from? Jews originated from the tribe of Judah, one of Jacob’s twelve sons. Jacob’s sons; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph and Benjamin made up the twelve tribes of Israel and each tribe would have been called according to the name of each son. So all the descendants of Judah were known as Jews, Dan’s descendants would have been called Danites, and descendants of Levi were known as Levites (yea the group of people who were in charge of taking care of the temple). **Genesis 49** is where you can find the father, Israel, blessing his twelve sons, the tribes of Israel. So now we know that Jews are descendants of Judah, and all Jews are Israelites and Hebrew, but not all Israelites are Jews.

I’m so confused...what are you saying exactly?

OK, let’s break it down. Abraham was Hebrew, but not an Israelite or a Jew because neither existed yet.

Isaac was Abraham's son. Isaac was Hebrew, but not an Israelite or a Jew because neither existed yet.

Jacob, who God renamed Israel, was Isaac's son. Jacob was Hebrew, but not a Jew because Jews originated with his son Judah. The first Israelites were the children of Jacob.

Judah was one of Jacob's twelve sons. Judah was Hebrew, and an Israelite. The first Jews were the children of Judah. The descendants of the other eleven of Jacob's sons were not Jews, but were themselves named accordingly e.g. from Levi came the Levites, from Benjamin came the Benjamites and so on.

A key descendant of Judah was King David, and the key descendant of King David was Y'shua. King David and Y'shua were Jews.

A vitally important fact in understanding the Bible is that while all Jews are Israelites, not all Israelites are Jews. All are Hebrews, but only the descendants of Judah are Jews. There is a deception at work that has a majority of people believing that most if not all of the Old Testament was written for the Jews because many people just assume that all the old figures in the bible must be Jews when in fact they are not. Most people believe that Yahweh led the Jews out of Egypt and while that is true, there is much more to the story. He also led the other eleven tribes out of Egypt as well as foreigners who chose to “cross over” and worship Yahweh.

So, the Jews are not Yahweh's chosen people?

According to the Bible, Yahweh's chosen people are the descendants of Israel who we now know are not just Jews, but all of the twelve tribes.

For you are a holy people to Yahweh your Elohim; Yahweh your Elohim has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 7:6)

So who is this verse talking about as a “chosen people”?

"Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is your Elohim, the Yahweh is one! 5You shall love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

Are you saying I have to trace my lineage back and be from one of the twelve tribes of Israel in order to have eternal life?

NO, not at all; even if you are not a natural born Israelite, you can still become one. According to the Bible anyone who chooses to believe in and follow the commands of Yahweh can be “grafted in”. This has been happening since the Exodus when foreigners came out of Egypt along with Israel.

**There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.
(Exodus 12:49)**

The natives would have been Israel and the strangers would have been everyone who wasn't part of Israel. Even though they were not born Israelites they were still grafted in and therefore under the same law. **Romans 11** talks in depth about being grafted in but to sum it up we could say that if you believe in Y'shua and follow the commands of Yahweh, you are Grafted In and have become a part of His "chosen people".

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

As you can see, the idea that the Jews alone are Yahweh's chosen people; that only the Jews were brought out of Egypt; that all of the Old Testament laws were given ONLY to the Jews is not accurate. Israel (not the country) is Yahweh's chosen people; Israel (both natural born and Gentiles who were "grafted in") were lead out of Egypt; and Yahweh's commandments, statutes and judgments were given to all of Israel.

1"Now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the judgments which I am teaching you to perform, so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which Yahweh, the Elohim of your fathers, is giving you. 2You shall not add to the word which I am commanding you, nor take away from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Yahweh your Elohim which I command you.

Of the 12 tribes, ten eventually split off at the end of King Solomon's reign and became the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Judah and Benjamin made up the Southern Kingdom. Eventually the tribes of Judah and Benjamin became known as the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

The ten northern tribes were exiled to Assyria and the two southern tribes were exiled to Babylon. The ten northern tribes never returned to the Promised Land and were scattered among the nations. In the later stages of the captivity and in the early stages of the return to Israel (the country) the tribe of Judah was dominant; this is why people today assume that all Israelites and Hebrew people are Jews. The combined tribes of Judah and Benjamin became known as Jews and because they were the only two tribes of Israel who returned this has caused much confusion about whom a Jew is and where they originated.

Yah Bless!