

INTERESTING FACTS ABOUT THE BIBLE (8)

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

In our last lesson we gave a brief summary of each of the 13 letters that Saul or Paul wrote in what is called the New Testament. Those 13 letters are Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon.

In this lesson we will define some terms that will help in your Bible study and prepare the way for our next lesson to introduce the book of Hebrews.

The name Hebrew means a "wanderer". The people of Israel began as a nation without a homeland so they were called "Hebrews" or "wanderers". However, the nation later was named after the grandson of Abraham, Jacob. God had changed Jacob's name to **ISRAEL** (meaning a "prince")(See Genesis 32:28), so the nation took this name, but the language of Israel continued to be called **HEBREW**. By the time of Jesus Christ, the people of Israel had been scattered for about 600 years into other parts of the world from the borders of India, to Spain and into Africa. Most spoke the language of the people they lived with or **GREEK**, which was the predominate language of the Roman Empire. Some were so devout to the old ways of the nation of Israel that they continued to speak Hebrew. Those who had moved back to the Jerusalem area especially emphasized the Hebrew language in their places of worship and in the home. So there were Greek speaking people who had descended from Israel, and there were those who spoke Hebrew. So people who came from Israel would refer to some of their race as GREEKS and some as HEBREWS (See Acts 6:1-5). They were from the same people, but these names would describe their language and possibly where they once lived. Those called HEBREWS lived mostly around Jerusalem, and those called Greeks were scattered throughout the rest of the Roman Empire where Greek was the universal language.

So lets review this important information:

ISRAEL is the name of the nation which came from Jacob (Abraham's grandson), who was also called Israel. A person who belonged to this race of people were called Israelites. Some of these people continued to speak their old language, held firmly to the old culture, and were called Hebrews.

QUESTION: HOW DID THESE SAME PEOPLE COME TO BE CALLED JEWS?

The man, Jacob or Israel, had 12 sons. Therefore, there were 12 tribes or groups of people who came from him. Many times in the Bible you will read about the 12 tribes of Israel. When they first entered their land around 1400 B.C., the land was divided according to the size of each tribe. One of the largest tribes in the south was named after one of the sons, **JUDAH**. This was the tribe that Jesus later came from.

The second king of the entire nation of Israel came from the tribe of Judah. His name was David (1010-970 B.C.). After the reign of his son, Solomon, the kingdom of Israel split into two separate nations. The northern kingdom was made up of ten tribes and kept the name ISRAEL. The southern kingdom, which kept the capital city of Jerusalem and the temple, was called JUDAH because Judah was its largest tribe and their kings came from that tribe. The name **JEW** is a shortened word for Ju-dah or Jew-dah.

At about 721 B.C., the northern kingdom of Israel was taken from their homeland by the empire of Assyria. They were scattered and after that played only a minor role in the Bible story. The southern kingdom, Judah, was scattered by Babylon, and Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. Judah continued to play a major role in Old Testament history because Jesus Christ was to come from this tribe. 70 years after Jerusalem was destroyed, a small number from this tribe returned and rebuilt the temple. As time went on, since most of the people who moved back to the area around Jerusalem were from Judah, people from all 12 tribes were eventually referred to as Jews!

So in the time of Jesus and the New Testament (first century A.D.), people from the same race were called Israelites, Hebrews, and Jews. A large percentage of the Jews who lived around Jerusalem spoke the Hebrew language and were also referred to as Hebrews. The book of Hebrews in the Bible was written to Jewish Christians who lived near Jerusalem. That is how the book of Hebrews got its name.

QUESTIONS:

1. What language did the people of Israel speak in the days of the Bible?
2. The man Israel first had the name _____.
3. In the time of Jesus Christ, people who were descendants of Israel spoke many different languages and lived in many parts of the world. WHY?
4. How many tribes of Israel were there?
5. What was the name of the tribe that Jesus came from?
6. The word "Jew" is taken from what tribe?