

Designations for the People of God

1. Imagine that you moved to a new country. How would the local residents know you by? How do Canaanites identify Abram?

Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram. (Gen 14:13, NKJV)

2. Note carefully Jacob's name change. What is the difference between a Hebrew and an Israelite?

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

So He said to him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Gen 32:24-28, NKJV)

Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank. (Gen 32:32, NKJV)

3. With his last words, Jacob blesses his sons with some notable words to Judah. Judah becomes the basis for the term Jew. What observations can you make to explain this association? Do you notice a progression over time?

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's children shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion's whelp;

From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. (Gen 49:8-10, NKJV)

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. (Ezra 5:1, NKJV)

And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them, (Est 9:20-23, NKJV)

4. What do you observe here? From what you have learned in this lesson, what other names are Believers known by?

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch. (Acts 11:26, NKJV)

Designations for the People of God

Teacher Notes

1. Imagine that you moved to a new country. How would the local residents know you by? How do Canaanites identify Abram?

Then one who had escaped came and told Abram the Hebrew, for he dwelt by the terebinth trees of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol and brother of Aner; and they were allies with Abram. (Gen 14:13, NKJV)

Ask the student: if you moved to a different continent, how would the local people know you as?

The term "Hebrew" is used as an ethnic designation.

2. Note carefully Jacob's name change. What is the difference between a Hebrew and an Israelite?

Then Jacob was left alone; and a Man wrestled with him until the breaking of day. Now when He saw that He did not prevail against him, He touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him. And He said, "Let Me go, for the day breaks."

But he said, "I will not let You go unless You bless me!"

So He said to him, "What is your name?"

He said, "Jacob."

And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed." (Gen 32:24-28, NKJV)

Therefore to this day the children of Israel do not eat the muscle that shrank, which is on the hip socket, because He touched the socket of Jacob's hip in the muscle that shrank. (Gen 32:32, NKJV)

Help the student think through his observations of the text. Hebrew is an ethnic term and "the children of Israel" refers to a tribe (Israel) within the Hebrew ethnic group. Make an example for the student to understand based on his ethnic group, and using a new name for him to designate his descendants as "the children of _____," a tribe within his ethnic group.

It is after David establishes the nation of Israel as a monarchy that "Israelite" replaces Hebrew as an ethnic designation and becomes a national identity that exists today.

3. With his last words, Jacob blesses his sons with some notable words to Judah. Judah becomes the basis for the term Jew. What observations can you make to explain this association? Do you notice a progression over time?

Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's children shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion's whelp;

From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He bows down, he lies down as a lion;

And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

The scepter shall not depart from Judah,

Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,

Until Shiloh comes;

And to Him shall be the obedience of the people. (Gen 49:8-10, NKJV)

Then the prophet Haggai and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophets, prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and **Jerusalem**, in the name of the God of Israel, who was over them. (Ezra 5:1, NKJV)

And Mordecai wrote these things and sent letters to all the Jews, near and far, who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, to establish among them that they should celebrate yearly the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month of Adar, as the days on which the Jews had rest from their enemies, as the month which was turned from sorrow to joy for them, and from mourning to a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and joy, of sending presents to one another and gifts to the poor. **So the Jews accepted the custom which they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them,** (Est 9:20-23, NKJV)

Ask the student: did you notice the phrase “the scepter shall not depart from Judah” in Genesis 49? What is Jacob (Israel) referring to? Hint: think about the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Jacob was making a reference to the promises God made to Abraham that kings will descend from him (Gen 17:6). Jacob was indicating that the Abrahamic Covenant was going to flow through the line of Judah.

The impact of who the covenant flows through is important. The descendants of Judah, the fourth son of Jacob (Israel), were known as Judeans. This tribal group name becomes the basis of the name “Jews,” and they become known as the “people of the Covenant” or “the Chosen”.

Ask the student: what do you perceive of Ezra’s writing? What has happened in world history?

Introduce world history to the student: when the monarchy divided into the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, the term “Jew” took on a geographical and national meaning; it represented the citizens of Judah living in God’s holy city Jerusalem and the kingdom ruled by the royal line of David.

Ask the student: what do you observe in the passage from Esther?

By the time the book of Esther was written, the term “Jew” began to have a religious designation; it represented those who followed the Law. Note that the Law for the Jews included additions to the Law of Moses.

Review with the student how the meaning of Jew changed and enlarged over time: 1) association with the kingly line of the Abrahamic Covenant, 2) association with the land of King David’s Jerusalem and God, and 3) follower of the Law.

4. What do you observe here? From what you have learned in this lesson, what other names are Believers known by?

And when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for a whole year they assembled with the church and taught a great many people. And the disciples were first called Christians (**Greek: christianos**) in Antioch. (Acts 11:26, NKJV)

Inform the student: “christianos” is the Greek word that is translated into “Christians.”

The Greek suffix “ianos” in “Christianos” (which means “follower of Christ”) originally applied to slaves.

Ask the student: how does this affect the meaning of Christians?

Christians are a slaves (or adherents) to Christ.