

THE UPWARD CALL

*Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet;
but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead,
**I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God
IN CHRIST JESUS.**
(Philippians 3:13-14 NASB)*

#04-1082

Historical Jews

August 4, 2010

I believe it is a true statement that there is a lot of misunderstanding among Christians today over the true meaning and nature of the word *Jew*, which has bolstered the error of **dualism, reversionism, and Zionism** that have been embraced by many Christians. Please see the last seven issues. The next several issues will be devoted to offering some further clarity on the subject. I cannot explain everything in one issue, so please bear with me. This issue is devoted to a historical review of the word *Jew*.

The word *Jew* is a shortened form of the words *Jehudahite, Judahite, or Judean*. In its primal usage, the word *Judahite* was the **patronymic name** for those descended from *Jehudah* or *Judah*, the fourth son of Jacob born through Leah (Genesis 29:35). Judah formed one of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob. Thus, it was not only the name of the patriarch but also of his tribe and descendants, along with all who joined his tribe, even though they were not related to Judah. The identity of the tribe always rested with the prince or chief of the tribe. Judah or Judea also became known as the area or territory occupied by the Jews. The city of Jerusalem was also identified with the Jew.

As long as the sons of Jacob-Israel were united as one kingdom, the Judahite or Jew would have been associated with the tribe of Judah. The fact of the matter is that men were generally identified by their tribe. For example, there were the Reubenites (1 Chronicles 11:42), the Simeonites (Numbers 25:14), the Levites (Exodus 6:19), the Gadites (Deuteronomy 3:12), the Ephraimites (Judges 12:5), and the Benjamites (Judges 3:15). Consequently, when the sons of Jacob spoke of one of their brothers as a Judahite, they would have been identifying their brother with the tribe of Judah and not with one of the other tribes of Jacob. Thus, early on, ***Jew*** or, more accurately, ***Judahite was a tribal name***.

However, a change came about in 931 BC when the United Kingdom of Israel was split into two distinct kingdoms. Because King Solomon's heart had turned away from the Lord, the Lord said to Solomon: **"I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days. I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen"** (1 Kings 11:9-13). True to His word, after Solomon died, the Lord tore the kingdom apart, dividing it into the house of Judah (southern kingdom of 2 tribes) and the house of Israel (northern kingdom of 10 tribes). Solomon's son Rehoboam, a Judahite, became the king of Judah. However, the tribe of Judah was not alone, for the tribe of Benjamin, along with most of the Levites, remained with Judah. This meant that the name *Jew* or *Judahite* moved from being strictly a **tribal name** to a **national name**. Thus, all associated with **the nation of Judah** from this point forward were known as Jews or Judahites. It should be added that some from the other tribes later returned to Jerusalem and also took up the national identity of Judah.

As an aside, with the breakup of the United Kingdom of Israel, it is recorded that **none but the tribe of Judah followed the house of David** (1 Kings 12:20). The reason that the tribe (also house) of Judah had to remain intact was not only because of the promise the Lord made to David (2 Samuel 7:16) but because of the blessing Jacob-Israel gave to his son Judah. The Lord chose Judah to be a leader (1 Chronicles 28:4), that is, to be the holder of the scepter.

"The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (Genesis 49:10 NASB)

Shiloh is a reference to the last King of Judah, who is none other than the Lord Jesus. The scepter had to remain with Judah until the Son of God, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, came to earth to take the scepter as the rightful King, not only of Judah but also of Israel and the whole world. Shiloh is the Repairer of the breach between Judah and Israel, for when He comes a second time, there will be only one kingdom.

It is vital to understand that, going forward from the division of the kingdom, the nation of Judah was separate from the nation of Israel. They were not the same. It is a mistake to think of Israel as Judah or Judah as Israel; a mistake made by many Christians. Proof of this division is in the following.

(5) Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah, king of Israel, came up to Jerusalem to wage war; and they besieged Ahaz, but could not overcome him. (6) At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram, and cleared the Judeans [Jews] out of Elath entirely.... (2 Kings 16:5-6 NASB [KJV])

This is the first mention of Judeans or Jews in the Bible, and it clearly shows that they were separate from the nation of Israel. The king of Israel had allied with the king of Syria to attack Jerusalem, which was the capital of the nation or kingdom of Judah. During this time, they drove the Jews out of Elath.

Further proof is discovered when, from 604-586 BC, the nation of Judah was taken captive by the Chaldeans (Babylonians) under the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, which started the 70 years of captivity.

But it came about in the seventh month, that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men and struck Gedaliah down so that he died along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. (2 Kings 25:25 NASB)

In 534 BC, the captivity ended and Judah was allowed to return to Jerusalem. As the next verse proves, those who returned were called Jews.

Let it be known to the king that the Jews who came up from you have come to us at Jerusalem; they are rebuilding the rebellious and evil city and are finishing the walls and repairing the foundations. (Ezra 4:12 NASB)

But there is more. After the captivity, it is clear that the word *Jew* was no longer used strictly as a national term either. It became a **religious name** for whoever converted to Judaism.

In each and every province and in each and every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree arrived, there was gladness and joy for the Jews, a feast and a holiday. And many among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the dread of the Jews had fallen on them. (Esther 8:17 NASB)

Esther and Mordecai were dispersed Jews living in Persia, meaning they were not living in the nation of Judah. With Mordecai's rise to fame, many of the inhabitants of the land, presumably Persians, converted to Judaism. Thus, the word *Jew* became a religious identifier.

Well, there is much more history that could be added to this, such as the Edomites being forcibly absorbed into Jewry in 126 BC, but what has been presented is enough to trace the meaning and use of the word *Jew* in history from the patriarch Judah to a time after the division of the United Kingdom of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon.

The point of this condensed history lesson is to prove that the Jew or Judahite was a distinct group of people associated with Judah and not with Israel. Once the kingdom was divided, a breach occurred between Judah and Israel and the two houses went their separate ways, both being taken into captivity at different times and by different people. However, only one house or nation or kingdom was associated with Jerusalem, and that was Judah. Israel never returned to Jerusalem as a distinct house or nation or kingdom. When they were taken captive by the Assyrians in 723-721 BC, their national identity as Israel was lost, and they were dispersed among the nations. The breach between Judah and Israel continues to this day, and the national identity of the house of Israel remains lost as well. Modern Israel is not this house, contrary to what many Christians or the world might believe.

As we have seen, the meaning of the word *Jew* has expanded over time. It started as a **patronymic and tribal name**, which meant those with the name were descendants of Judah. It then became a **national name**, which meant all associated with the nation of Judah were Jews, even if they were not direct descendants of Judah. However, early on, most of the Jews were related through their father Jacob. Then, the Jew became a **religious name** for those of the religion of **Judaism**. A genealogical connection to Judah was not necessary, for other races could and did convert to Judaism.