

St. Jerome Adult Bible Study
Introduction to the Letter to the Hebrews
Notes

The name “Hebrew” is ancient and comes from the eponymous patriarch Eber (עֶבֶר) who was the great great grandson of Noah (Genesis 11:10 – 14). Abram (Abraham) was Eber’s great great great great grandson (Genesis 11:16 – 27). The first use of the name in the Bible is in Genesis 14:13 –

¹³A fugitive came and brought the news [that Abram’s nephew Lot had been captured by warring tribes in Sodom and Gomorrah] to Abram the Hebrew, who was camping at the terebinth of Mamre the Amorite, a kinsman of Eshcol and Aner; these were in league with Abram.

The word “Hebrew” is also the name of the language spoken by the Hebrews.

The use of the name seemingly died out after Saul consolidated the kingdom and the people became more commonly called “Israelites.” “Israel” is a term that means “God rules” and God gave the name to Jacob (after Jacob wrestled with the angel – see Genesis 32:28) and, therefore, Jacob’s sons were “sons of Israel” and the nation united under David was filled with the “Twelve Tribes of Israel” or, simply, “Israelites.”

After the kingdom was divided following the death of Solomon, the Northern Kingdom was called “Israel” and the Southern Kingdom was known as “Judah” (*Yehudah* יהודה) which means “praise God”) after the Tribe that occupied it along with a splinter of the Tribe of Benjamin. The people who lived there became known as “Yehudi” (or “Jews” in English).

“Judah” and, thus, “Jew” are proud names. “Judah” in Hebrew (יהודה) contains the four letters of the Tetragrammaton YHWH (יהוה) or, in English, Yahweh, which is the Name of God and probably means something like “he who exists.”

Hebrews, Israelites, and Jews are, basically, the same people – all descendants of Abraham.