

Purpose: to encourage you to trust and obey the risen Messiah.
“Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts...”

Abraham's Ethnic Group:

What's in a Name?

Written by Mick Abraham

Progress Report

Now that the “new millennium” is well under way, let's review the interesting human phenomenon known as prejudice.

Prejudice Examined

Prejudice is all about “pre-judgement”, or “judgement in advance”. We've all heard that “you can't judge a book by its cover”, but many book buyers do exactly that. Publishers invest heavily in cover design, because they know that human behavior inevitably includes pre-judgement.

With so many books and so little time to read them all, shortcuts like “cover judging” must occur, even though such judgements are very imperfect.

People Prejudice

In similar fashion, snap decisions about other people are often based on superficial observations. After all, there are millions of people, and very little time to really know them all. As the psalmist says: “**Man looks on the outward appearance...**”

When people look for clues and shortcuts to evaluate other people, physical appearance is a big factor; the manner of speaking is another one. Strangely, people may be judged simply because they live in a certain nation—even though one's country of origin tells very little about the person.

Another important factor used in pre-judgement is the name that a person bears. This, too, is a fallacy.

What's in a Name?

I know from personal lifelong experience what it is like to be prejudged based on your name. My last name is Abraham. For many people in the Western Hemisphere, this automatically indicates Jewish ethnicity. Couple a name like that with black hair and dark eyes, and some people make this assumption even more readily.

For many, Jewish extraction conjures up associations that may be negative or positive. That's a story in itself, but I don't want any advantage or disadvantage because of the prejudicial assumption that I am Jewish. The pre-judgement in itself is the problem, because it represents bad thinking.

Mick Abraham's Background

My most identifiable ancestors were from Lebanon—a nation in the Middle East with many Christian influences. My father was full blood Lebanese, and he came to America through Ellis Island in the early 1900's.

My dad's father had the surname of Malouf, not Abraham. Malouf is a common name in Lebanon, and my grandfather was one of many immigrant dry goods peddlers named Malouf. He didn't want to be confused with his “cousins”, so he took his father's first name for his surname. Great grandfather was Ibrahim Malouf—from which our Abraham family name was derived. This practice of deriving a surname from “Dad's” first name can be traced to antiquity.



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Abraham, the Original

Just as it is wrong to assume that I am Jewish simply because I am named Abraham, it is also wrong to assume that the original Abraham of scripture was “a Jew”. Surprised? Consider the following:

A Word Study

Words such as “Jew”, “Jewess”, and “Jewry” can be easily followed in Scripture with a Concordance. Wherever they appear in the Old Scriptures, these words always can be traced back to one of the “yeh-hood” words in the Hebrew/Chaldee language. You’ll find these words as #3061 through #3067 in Strong’s Concordance. The yeh-hood words all ultimately point to the name Judah (or Yehudah).

Abram’s ancestry is recorded in some detail in Genesis, but he had no recorded predecessor by the name of Judah or Yehudah. In fact Abraham was an ancestor to Judah, not his descendant. To say that “Abraham was a Jew” is to partially reverse the historical sequence of this family.

Family Tree

Abraham’s “son of the promise” was Isaac, and Isaac’s “son of the promise” was Jacob (later renamed Israel). Abraham was not a Saxon (son of Isaac), and he was not an Israelite, either.

Jacob/Israel had twelve sons, and one of these was Judah. He was the original Judean, the original dweller in the land of Judah, and could be referred to as the original “Jew”. Abraham died before Judah was even born, so he cannot be accurately described as a Judahite or as Jewish.

Precise Language, Please

Judah had eleven brothers: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulon, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Joseph, and Benjamin. To call Abraham a Judahite, we might as well also call him a Reubenite, a Levite, etc. Let’s be careful; sloppy terminology can result in a more confused understanding of the Bible.

The “Original Jew”?

I stated that Judah could correctly be referred to as the original Jew, but the King James translators did not do this. The word “Jew” (in the KJV Bible) first occurs in the book of II Kings. The II Kings events occurred thousands of years after Judah lived. I think the translators made a good decision here, because in Kings the name of Judah applies to more than just one man (and even more than just one tribe). By this time the Abrahamic nation had split in two, with one of the resulting nations referred to as Judah. This nation did not include all of the Israelites, however, so the word, “Jew” does not equal the word “Israelite”.

So Who Was This Guy?

Simple: Abraham was the original “Abrahamite”. He can properly be referred to as a “Semite”, because Shem was his multi-great grandfather. (However, Abraham was not the original Semite, nor the only one.) Beware of misleading shortcuts and pre-judgements. I hope this study will help my readers draw conclusions more slowly, and that it will help them gain a better understanding of the Bible and the world.



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