Who are the people of faith in the Bible?

1. What is a Hebrew? Consult Genesis 14:13; 40:15 and Exodus 5:3.

   The term "Hebrew" is used as an ethnic designation. First used of Abraham (Gen 14:13), it was also used to differentiate the race of slaves (Gen 39:14, 17). It was a well known term that designated Abraham's land (Gen 40:15) and Abraham's God (Ex 3:18; 5:3).

   While it is unknown, scholars suspect that the etymology of the term "Hebrew" is based on the name "Eber" who was a descendant of Noah though Shem (Gen 10:21, 25; 11:10-26) and ancestor of Abraham.

   After David establishes the nation of Israel as a monarchy, the term "Hebrew" disappears as an ethnic term.

2. What is an Israelite? Study Genesis 32:24-30 and 1 Samuel 14:21.

   After wrestling with Jacob, God blesses him and changes his name to Israel, which means "he strives with God" (Gen 32:24-30; 35:9-13). Subsequent to Jacob, the name Israel designated all of his descendants; the twelve tribes were known as "sons of Israel" (Gen 32:32; 36:31; Ex 1:7-13; Ex 2:25), "children of Israel" (Deut 1:3), "Israelites" (Ex 35:29; 1 Sam 14:21; Rom 9:4) and "house of Israel" (Ex 16:31; Lev 17:3).

   With the Exodus, the offspring of Jacob became the nation of Israel, and any citizen of it became known as an Israelite.

   Thus, while Israel began as a tribal group within the ethnic race of Hebrews, it eventually became a national identity.

3. What is a Jew? Observe Exodus 31:2; 2 Kings 25:25 and Esther 9:20-27.

   The Hebrew term for Jew was originally a tribal term; it represented the descendants of Judah, the fourth son of Jacob (Israel) (Ex 31:2; Num 2:9; 2 Kings 18:26). Thus Judeans are a tribal subset of Jacob (Israel).

   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, the kingdom ruled by the royal line of David (2 Kings 25:25; Ezra 5:1; Neh 1:2).

   At some point during or after the Babylonian Captivity, the term "Jew" began to have a religious designation; it represented those who followed the Mosaic Law (Esth 9:20-27).

   By the time of the New Testament, the term "Jew" is used as a reference to an ethno-national religious group. However, Jesus does not appear to see the term "Jew" as a genetic descendant of Abraham; instead, one is considered a child of Abraham if they have faith in Jesus Christ, the "seed" of Abraham (John 8:31-47; Rev 2:9; 3:9).

4. What is a Christian? See Acts 11:26; 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.

   The Greek suffix "ianos" in "Christianos" (which means "follower of Christ") originally applied to slaves; thus, Christians are a slave (or adherent) to Christ.

   It was first used for Christians in Syrian Antioch (Acts 11:26), scholars believe that its early use was with ridicule by outsiders. Prior to the adoption of the term, Christians called themselves "Believers" (Acts 5:14), "brothers" (Acts 6:3) and "saints" (Acts 9:13).

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