Essay On Terms & The Name Jew

Context in John 1:19-24

In examining John 1:19-24, differences in terminology between the King James Version (KJV) and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) provide a fascinating glimpse into the complexities of Jewish identity during the time of Jesus. Understanding these nuances requires exploring the historical, cultural, and scriptural contexts of terms like “Jews,” “Pharisees,” “priests,” and “Levites.”

Understanding the Term “Jews”

John 1:19 (KJV) states, “when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem.” The term “Jews” (Greek: Ἰουδαῖοι, G2453) originates from the Hebrew word □□□□□□□□□ (Yehudim), referring to the descendants of Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. However, by the time of the New Testament, “Jews” had evolved to encompass not only the people of the tribe of Judah but also the inhabitants of Judea, the geographical region where Jerusalem was located. Thus, “Jews” broadly referred to the religious and ethnic identity of the people living in this area, regardless of their specific tribal affiliation.

The Role of the Pharisees

The Pharisees were a distinct religious sect within Judaism. The Greek term Φαρισαῖος (Pharisaîos, Strong’s G5330) comes from a Hebrew root meaning “separatist.” They were known for their strict adherence to the Law of Moses and the oral traditions. John 1:24 (NASB) states, “And the messengers had been sent from the Pharisees,” indicating that the delegation sent to question John the Baptist included Pharisees. The Pharisees were influential in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling

council, which included priests, Levites, and other Jewish leaders.

Priests and Levites

Priests and Levites held specific religious roles in Jewish society. Priests were descendants of Aaron, Moses' brother, and came from the tribe of Levi. They were responsible for performing sacrifices and rituals in the Temple. Levites, also from the tribe of Levi, assisted the priests and had duties related to the maintenance of the Temple and its services. While all priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests.

The Sanhedrin

The Sanhedrin was the supreme council and tribunal of the Jewish people during the time of the Second Temple and into the early centuries of the Common Era. It functioned as the highest religious, legal, and political authority among the Jews. The Sanhedrin was composed of seventy-one members, including the high priest, who served as its president. Members included chief priests, elders, and scribes, representing various religious sects such as the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Sanhedrin met in Jerusalem and had jurisdiction over religious and legal matters, including interpreting Jewish law, resolving disputes, and overseeing the Temple's operations. It played a significant role in the trial of Jesus, as depicted in the New Testament.

Distinguishing the Groups

1. **The Jews as a Broad Term**: In John 1:19, "the Jews" refers broadly to the Jewish people or the Jewish leadership in Jerusalem. This term does not specify tribal affiliation and can include individuals from various tribes, including Judah, Levi, and others living in Judea.

2. **Pharisees**: The Pharisees, mentioned specifically in John 1:24, were a religious group within Judaism. They were not defined by tribal lineage but by their religious beliefs and practices.
3. **Priests and Levites**: These were specific roles within the Jewish religious system. They were of the tribe of Levi, distinct from the tribe of Judah. Despite their Levitical lineage, they were also referred to as "Jews" in the sense of their broader ethnic and religious identity.

Geographical vs. Tribal Identity

The term "Jews" in the New Testament often has a geographical connotation, referring to the people living in Judea, including Jerusalem. Thus, priests and Levites residing in this region would be called Jews in a geographical sense, even though their tribal lineage was from Levi, not Judah. This dual usage underscores the complexity of identity in ancient Jewish society, where religious, tribal, and geographical factors intertwined.

The Edomites and Forced Conversion

During the Hasmonean dynasty, particularly under John Hyrcanus (reigned 134–104 BCE), the Edomites (Idumaeans) were forcibly converted to Judaism. This campaign was part of an effort to consolidate Jewish control over the region. As a result, many Edomites adopted Jewish customs and practices, and some even rose to positions of influence within Jewish society. This historical fact implies that some of the Jewish leadership, including groups like the Pharisees, could have included individuals of Edomite descent who were practicing Judaism. This is consistent with the understanding that the Pharisees were defined more by their religious beliefs and practices rather than by strict tribal lineage.

Scriptural References and Conclusion

- **Tribal Identity**: Genesis 29:34 and Exodus 2:1-2 detail the origins of the tribes of Levi and Judah.
- **Roles and Duties**: Numbers 3:5-10 and Leviticus 8 outline the roles of the priests and Levites.
- **New Testament Context**: The Gospels and Acts frequently mention the interactions between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the Jewish leadership, providing context for the various groups' roles and perspectives (e.g., Matthew 23, Acts 5:34-39).

In conclusion, the term "Jews" in John 1:19 encompasses a broad ethnic and geographical identity, including Pharisees, priests, and Levites. While priests and Levites were of the tribe of Levi, they were also considered Jews due to their residence in Judea. The Pharisees, as a religious group, were part of this broader Jewish identity. Understanding these nuances helps clarify the relationships and distinctions among these groups in the biblical narrative. Additionally, the forced conversion of the Edomites during the Hasmonean period adds another layer of complexity to the identity of the Jewish leadership, indicating that not all were of pure Israelite or Judahite descent.

Judah's First Wife and Theological Reflections on Israel's Identity

Introduction

The story of Judah, one of Jacob's twelve sons, provides significant insights into the broader narrative of Israel's history and theological implications regarding identity, intermarriage, and God's redemptive plan. This essay explores

Judah’s first wife, the implications of intermarriage, the identity of the Jewish people, and the theological understanding of who constitutes the “sons of God” today.

Judah’s First Wife and Lineage

Judah’s first wife was the daughter of a Canaanite man named Shua. Her name is not mentioned in the Bible. Judah had three sons with her: Er, Onan, and Shelah (Genesis 38:1-5). Additionally, Judah had twin sons, Perez and Zerah, with Tamar, his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38:24-30). This intermarriage with a Canaanite woman is a critical point as it highlights early instances of Israelite integration with surrounding cultures.

Biblical Prohibitions Against Intermarriage

The Bible contains explicit prohibitions against intermarriage with Canaanites, as seen in Deuteronomy 7:3-4:

> *“Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods, and the Lord’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.”*

Despite these commands, instances of intermarriage occurred, such as Judah’s marriage to the Canaanite woman and Joseph’s marriage to Asenath, an Egyptian (Genesis 41:45). These relationships show the complexities of maintaining distinct ethnic and religious identity.

Identity and Inclusion in God’s Plan

The story of Judah and other tribes’ intermarriage can be viewed through a theological lens. Despite Judah’s actions, which included marrying a Canaanite and fathering children with Tamar, God’s plan continued through his lineage, culminating in the birth of Christ. This lineage includes

notable figures like Rahab, a Canaanite, and Ruth, a Moabite, highlighting that God's redemptive plan transcends ethnic boundaries.

The Sons of God: A New Identity in Christ

John 1:11-13 defines the "sons of God" as those who receive and believe in Jesus Christ:

> *"He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."*

This passage emphasizes that being a child of God is based on faith in Christ rather than ethnic or national identity.

Israel and the Jews Today

The modern identity of Jews and their relationship with God is complex. While many Jews today do not accept Jesus as the Messiah, the New Testament suggests that God's promises to Israel remain. Paul, in Romans 11, speaks of a future hope for Israel's acceptance of Christ, indicating that God's covenant with Israel is not nullified by their current unbelief.

Revelation and False Claims

Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 address specific communities claiming to be Jews but are not. These passages are often interpreted as addressing issues of spiritual authenticity rather than making broad ethnological statements. They highlight the importance of genuine faith and obedience over mere ethnic identity.

Conclusion

The narrative of Judah and his descendants, along with the broader story of Israel, illustrates that God's plan for

humanity transcends ethnic and national boundaries. The inclusion of Gentiles and the call for Jews to accept Christ as the Messiah reflect the inclusive nature of God’s salvation. Understanding these theological and historical contexts helps Christians appreciate the complexity of Jewish identity and fosters respectful dialogue between Christians and Jews. Ultimately, the message of the Gospel is that all who believe in Christ, regardless of their ethnic background, are welcomed as children of God.