

Are Christians Hebrews?

Years ago, before I realized that the phrase “Gentile Christian”¹ is actually a contradiction in terms, I also thought the terms “Hebrew” and “Jew” were synonymous. Jews today certainly wouldn’t allow the term “Hebrew” to apply to Christians without a fight, and most Christians certainly don’t consider themselves Hebrews either. Spiritually speaking, neither “religion” can legitimately claim to be Hebrews simply based on tradition or bloodline. *Looking closer, the term actually applies to a specific heart condition of a believer.* Many of the foundational themes of our faith such as baptism, being born again, and even resurrection are found hidden within the ancient form of the word “Hebrew” and its variations.

Studying the term “Hebrew” can seem complex because in modern English it has evolved to include a people group, a race, a nation, and a language. However, the purpose of this article is to show a deeper theme as we restore “Hebrew” according to the original Scriptural understanding. We will base what we find on the term’s role in Biblical history, and the especially the *roots* of the language². As with most Hebrew language studies, the *concept embedded in the language is far more important* than the precise English translation. Western (Greek) thought strives to be accurate *to the letter*, while Hebrew thought is more interested in the themes and patterns. We really have to overcome our Western mindsets to understand the message being conveyed by the authors, and more importantly the heart of The Father. This is what Paul meant in **2 Corinthians 3:6**, “The letter kills, but the spirit gives life.” This thematic nature of the Hebrew mind and language is also why Yeshua often taught in parables, and why His stories still impact the human heart in a deep way 2000 years later and translated out of His native tongue and into every language.

The original root to the English word “Hebrew” are the letters Ayin, Bet, and Resh:

(read Hebrew letters from right to left)

ע ב ר

These letters can be modified to be used as a noun, an adjective, or a verb, therefore עבר can be pronounced several ways depending on the context and the conjugation. As a verb עבר translates into English as “to pass” or “to cross over”. עבר (pronounced ‘abar’) is first used and translated as “pass” in **Genesis 8:1** “But God remembered Noah and all the beasts and all the livestock that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind **pass** over the earth, and the waters subsided.” This is very profound, as the word for “wind” in Hebrew is “ruach”, which also means “Spirit”. Several chapters earlier, in **Genesis 1:2**, we find that “The **Spirit** of God was *hovering* over the waters”. The earth at that early stage had yet to experience life, sin, or death. The Spirit was present, but is described as ‘hovering’ as opposed to moving and active. Contrast that with **Genesis 8:1** (above), where the Spirit is *crossing* from place to place, “passing over” the whole earth.

¹ Ephesians 2:11 “Wherefore remember, that ye being **in time past** Gentiles in the flesh...”, reminds us that we are FORMER Gentiles, as now we are one in Messiah, and therefore we are Hebrews, like He is and will eternally be.

² Originally, the language of the early Scriptures more resembled hieroglyphics than any modern language structure. Each individual word is built with “letter pictures” that each symbolize a theme. Together, these images tell a story that captures the spirit (but *not* the precise definition) of the word itself. Eventually, these pictures morphed into the simple letters we all recognize, but the themes are still present, lending great insight to the nature of the heart of the Father. Even the names of the Hebrew letters are still based on what the ancient picture of it was (i.e. the letter “Mem” (which became our English ‘M’) used to be a picture of water, and the word for water is “pronounced ‘ma’im” Mem can imply “water”, “life giving”, or even “chaos”. For much more on this subject visit www.ancient-hebrew.org.

The word for “Passover”, the appointed time for remembering the birth of a nation and freedom from bondage is *not* the same word, nor is it related to the same letters. The idea, though, of YHVH “passing over” the whole earth after such a devastating judgment, and thereby allowing Noah and his family to start afresh is certainly the beginning of an important pattern.

The very act of the flood itself contains the concept and object lesson of the sinful earth being “put to death”. That lesson is followed by another--His life giving Spirit returning to allow the earth to be “born again”. This brings to mind Yeshua’s words on being “born again”, in **John 3:8**, “The wind [“ruach” or “spirit”] blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” Yeshua is describing the nature of the Spirit within a true “Hebrew”.

While the official title “Hebrew” is not given to Noah or Adam in Scripture, we see upon further inspection, that the pattern of what makes a Hebrew is established in the story of Adam’s creation. **Genesis 2:5-8**, “and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—then YHVH Elohim formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. And YHVH Elohim planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.” YHVH made Adam from the earth *outside* of the garden, *brought him through* the **watery** mist, and then *placed* him in the garden. Again all of the elements that make a Hebrew are there. He crossed over from a “lifeless somewhere”, through, over, or under water, and into a Holy place. With these two witnesses (the creation of man, and the flood) we see an established pattern. A key component to a true Hebrew is that **a Hebrew is led by the Spirit, has “crossed over” from one place to another, through water, from spiritual death to spiritual life.**

The first time the term עֵבֶר (pronounced ‘eebree’) is used as an official title it refers to Abram (not yet renamed “Abraham”). At this point in his walk, Abram was mostly known for “crossing over” the Euphrates River from Haran into the soon-to-be “Promised Land”. He *used to be* a Chaldean, but as of Genesis 14:13 he is officially declared to be a Hebrew. He had turned his back on his past, and had chosen a new life in a new land. In Abram’s case, he did not leave one family to join another—he left one family and **FOUNDED** another. He had made a clear break with his bloodline family, and had chosen instead to identify with YHVH, even if he would be alone in doing so.

Yeshua underscores the need for His spiritual family to make that same choice in **Matthew 10:34-39**, “Do not think that I came to bring peace on the earth; I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.” Of course, this difficult choice Messiah requires is not restricted to family; any sort of peer pressure must be recognized and cut off, even within a “church” if a supposed brother or pastor is drawing a true Hebrew *away* from walking with YHVH. Of course, once “the members of his household” choose to become Hebrews too, the “natural” family bond is even stronger than before, as the restored family now all shares the same heavenly Father, and the rules of His house. This was the case with Lot, who also “crossed over” with Abram, but not with Abram’s father Terah. Terah did leave his homeland behind and traveled with Abram and Lot, but stopped short (and died) before actually “crossing over” the river with them.

We can get some really interesting insight into the meaning of Abram’s name, if we go back to the ancient word pictures it was constructed with. In the original language, the first letters in Abram’s name are Aleph, Bet, Resh, and Mem:

(read Hebrew letters from right to left)

אברם

This is traditionally understood as these two “word groupings” combined into one concept:

רם (Highest or Prideful) + אב (Father)

Prophetically, Abram is forever identified with fatherhood...he’s the father of Isaac and eventually the father of many nations. The irony of his name is he didn’t have his first child until he was 70! Talk about pressure. In the end he is known as the father of not just Judaism and Christianity, but Islam as well. Thanks Abram.

If we see those same letters into 3 groups instead, we get some fresh information:

ם (Water) + בר (Grain) + א (Strongest or First)

In the ancient pictorial language, the word for grain³ is the picture of a house (or family) beside a picture of a head. The picture portrays a “family of heads”...imagine a full field with the tops of each stalk full of ripe bundles of grain. So, the traditional meaning of Abram’s name contains a promise of a multitude of physical human seed, but the second meaning conveys the *concept* of the first small piece of grain that will eventually grow into the eventual end-times harvest. As Yeshua said in **Matt 13:31-23**, "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." This word picture also confirms that the heart of the Father is for true Hebrews to “be fruitful and multiply” --not just physical offspring when possible, but the even more important spiritual fruit. Also, the water Abram crossed over on his way out of Ur was the Euphrates River, which in Hebrew is called “Parat”, derived from the word “Parah”, meaning “Fruitful”—specifically the fruitfulness displayed when *grain* is threshed on the threshing floor.

When YHVH changed Abram’s name, we get another puzzle piece:

ם (Water) + ה (Holy Spirit or “Behold”) + בר (Grain) + א (Strongest or First)

When YHVH (יהוה) changed Abram’s name, He inserted the ה (which represents the Spirit) to make him Abraham. Also notice that the ה (The Spirit) “splits” the מ (pride) right in two! Also, by יהוה inserting part of Himself into that part of Abram’s name, Abram was no longer considered “the highest”. The other thing we can’t help but notice here, is that there is a very important piece of the name יהוה, given to Abram to change His identity. Much like a bride when she gets married takes on her groom’s identity (name), so did Abram as he became Abraham. He took on part of יהוה’s identity as the Spirit was inserted in him to

³ The letters בר translate into the sounds of B and R. Some English words such as Beer, Barley, and Barn continue to show their ancient themes through their modern spellings.

consummate their covenant⁴. Sarai, Abraham’s wife undertook the same name change, with the ך from the Father replacing the last letter of her name.⁵

One last letter grouping we noticed in Abraham’s name change:

(read Hebrew letters from right to left)

ם (Water) + ברה (To Make a Choice) + א (Strongest or First)

As we take the same key letters, and regroup them again, this time putting the focus on the three middle letters, we get see a verb-- ‘barah’ – ‘to make a choice’. This seems to be telling us that after trying it his own way, Abraham was now committing to CHOOSING YHVH’s way. This underscores another crucial aspect to being a Hebrew. YHVH offers us the gift of grace, but we as Hebrews must *choose* to accept it, and then after doing so must continue to choose to stay in relationship with Him. Also, see the possible picture of choosing one side of “the water” or the other...as Noah, Abraham, Moses, and all Hebrews must eventually do. Making that “Strongest or First” **choice** is at the heart of “crossing over”. As Messiah said in Matt 22:14, “...for many are called, but few are chosen.”

Back to the original word for “Hebrew”:

בר (Grain) + ע (To See or Reveal)

Putting ע, (a picture of an eye), before בר (Grain), and you get “the family of heads *revealed*”. This specific word for “grain” we have been discussing is not the most common one used in Scripture -- in fact, it is rarely used. However, it is the word chosen and used often in the story of Joseph. Remember that Joseph, like Abraham, was separated from his family and relied solely on YHVH. As part of this separation process, Joseph was also dropped into a well, but it was a DRY well. He did however cross back across the Nile to bury Jacob, and later his dead body crossed through the Red Sea (his dying wish fulfilled) along with Moses thus fulfilling the “crossing over water” theme. Joseph was taken to Egypt by YHVH to be a kind of keeper of the “grain”, to be a type of savior not just to His family, but to all nations. **Genesis 41:49**, “And Joseph stored up **grain** in great abundance, *like the sand of the sea*, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured”. This is a type of fulfillment of the promise to Abraham in **Genesis 22:17**, “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven *and as the sand that is on the seashore.*”

Just as Joseph’s grain multiplied in Egypt, so did the human grain that began under Joseph’s care. What had started out as just 70 men, had eventually grown into millions. But, what had begun as a blessing had now turned into bondage (Egypt means “bondage” in Hebrew). Moses was then selected by YHVH to be the next human role-model for the components of the Hebrew heart. He was “drawn out” of water as a baby (Moses means “drawn out”), then he “crossed over” to Midian as an adult, then “crossed over” again to Egypt.

⁴ “Covenant” in Hebrew is בר plus ה (the letter Tav) -- ברה (pronounced ‘Brit’). The letter Tav means “sign”. Abraham was given circumcision, the “sign” that a Hebrew had chosen to enter into a covenant with YHVH.

⁵ שרײ (Sarai) means MY princess. The ך (yud) represents a hand, in this case a *closed* hand, implying Sarai’s control. By changing her name to שרה The Father replaced her tight grip with His ה (Spirit), while leaving the core meaning of ‘Princess’ the same. Before Sarai gave up her control, she suggested that Abram impregnate Hagar, trying to force YHVH’s promise into reality. For a future study, the word ישראל (Israel) is based on the same core שר (ruler) but with the “hand” in front, and ‘El’ YHVH’s title at the end. Both Abraham and Sarah shared the same journey from Ur, and also shared in the internal transformations of their hearts and their names. The two were one flesh, although Abraham gets most of the credit in writing.

Finally, on that first Passover, Moses and his fellow countrymen all followed the leading of The Spirit, and “crossed over” the Red Sea. All 3 million men, women, and children were collectively reborn as an entire nation of Hebrews. Again, we see the “family of heads, revealed”, as they all put their trust in YHVH alone that day, and were “born again”, not as just as individuals and Tribes, but as a the Commonwealth of Israel.

All Hebrews, then and now, were once like lifeless seeds in “bondage”, but after following the Spirit, and “crossing over” into the kingdom, through the water of our baptism, we begin a new life in a completely new form. The same root word for “grain”, **בֵּר**, can also be translated as “pure” or “clean”.⁶ Both purity and cleanliness are displayed by a Hebrew’s Mikvah (baptism) in water. This underscores the truth that the “rite” of baptism has always been a truth taught in the Torah and is was not a New Testament invention by John the Baptist. It also reminds us that baptism marks the beginning of our walk, and is not the final step. Living a Spirit-led life as a Hebrew is a process, in the same way that the germination of a seed, it’s transformation into a plant, the production of fruit, and the creation of more seeds is a process.

Paul clearly understands the concept of **בֵּר** in the heart of a true Hebrew, as he describes it in 1Corinthians chapter 15:

“What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other **grain**. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. Not all flesh is alike, but there is one flesh for human beings, another for animals, another for birds, and another for fish. There are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one thing, and that of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; indeed star differs from star in glory. So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we will also bear the image of the man of heaven. What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”

Of course, the perfect example of a true Hebrew is Yeshua Himself. Although the gospels in their original Hebrew language have been mostly lost to us, we can easily spot all of these same Hebraic concepts in the life and teachings of the Messiah. Yeshua’s baptism was not needed to wash Him clean, as He was sinless; nevertheless, the object lesson of “crossing over water” needed to be demonstrated as a model for us...his future Hebrew disciples. He used “grain” or a similar word in numerous parables, including the Matt 13:1, “Parable of the Seed Sower”, Matt 13:24 “The Weeds and The Tares”, and Mark 4:26, “The Parable of the Growing Seed”. He says in John 12:24, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a **grain** of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.” He was of course referring both to Himself and to us. In the gospel of John, Yeshua said that He was the source of “Living Water”, and in Matthew 14 He chose to walk on the water, and invited Peter to come with Him. He wasn’t just showing off. Yeshua, yet again, was reiterating the Old Testament object lessons about what it means to be a Hebrew.

⁶ The word ‘clean’ can be inferred based on the **soap** made from the burnt **grain** ashes. Do you see how subtle some of these Hebrew nuance’s can be?

Many Christians, unaware of their own Hebrew roots, also ignore Paul's important warning in Romans 14, "But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, although a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing root of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches. *If you are, remember it is not you who support the root, but the root that supports you.* The New Testament contains the same themes and truths as the Old Testament. Once we recognize that the grain planted within us is from a *Hebrew* Messiah, and we are supposed to allow it to grow within us, to allow it to transform us into His likeness, we must also accept that we are now just as much of a Hebrew as our Savior, and the rest of our ancestors in the Old Testament.

A true Hebrew has nothing to do with our fleshly bloodline. In the end we are all related by blood to Adam (whose name simply means 'man' and 'dirt', and implies 'first blood'). Adam, Abraham, and Joseph were not Jews, and even Moses was a Levite, not a Jew. Instead, a true Hebrew is someone who has crossed over out of bondage. They have had the seed of YHVH planted in their hearts. They have allowed the Messiah's work to purify them, and have gone through the rite of baptism as an object lesson of their death as well as their cleansing. That baptism, along with the Living Water of the Messiah, watered that seed, and therefore a true Hebrew is producing abundant fruit. This is not a once and done makeover, but like any transformation, it is a process. Paul reminds us that we were not born as Hebrews, but that the work of Messiah has invited us to "cross over" out of the "world" **Ephesians 2:12**, "remember that you were at that time separated from Messiah, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." The final transforming of our dust nature into our perfect nature will only occur upon the return of Messiah. **Philippians 1:6** "...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Messiah Yeshua."