Do you know The difference between

HEBREW, ISRAELITE, JEWISH AND ISRAELI?

by Pastor Antônio Junior

ASHER

NAPHTALI

MANASSEH

JORDAN RIVER

GAD

FRAIM

BENJAMIM

REUBEN

JUDAH

DEAD SEA
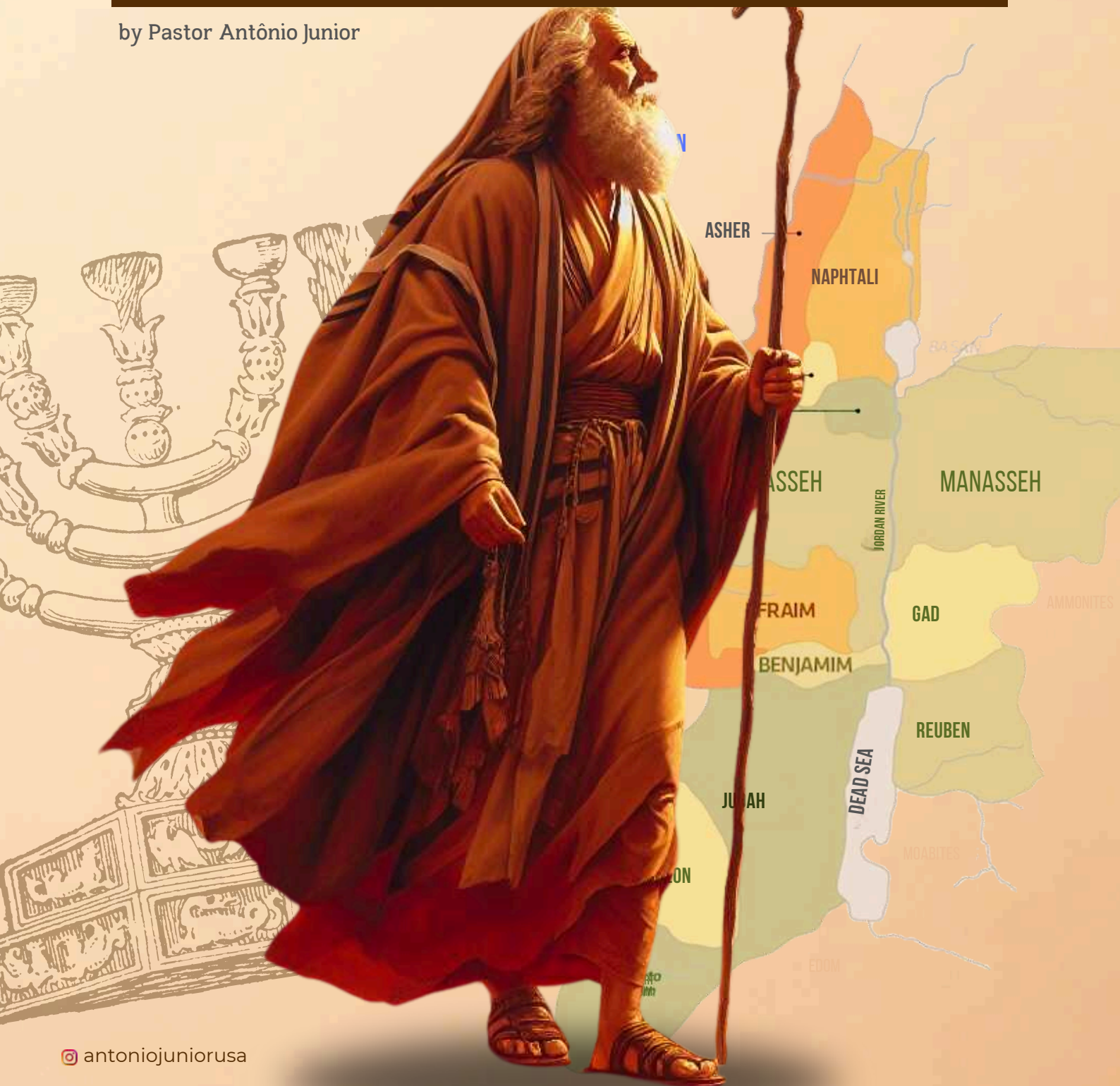
INTRODUCTION

In the study of the Old Testament and the traditions related to the people described as "God's chosen", it is crucial to understand the distinction between the terms "Hebrew", "Israelite", "Jew" and "Israeli".

Although they are often used synonymously, each of these terms carries a different meaning and is associated with different periods and historical and religious contexts.
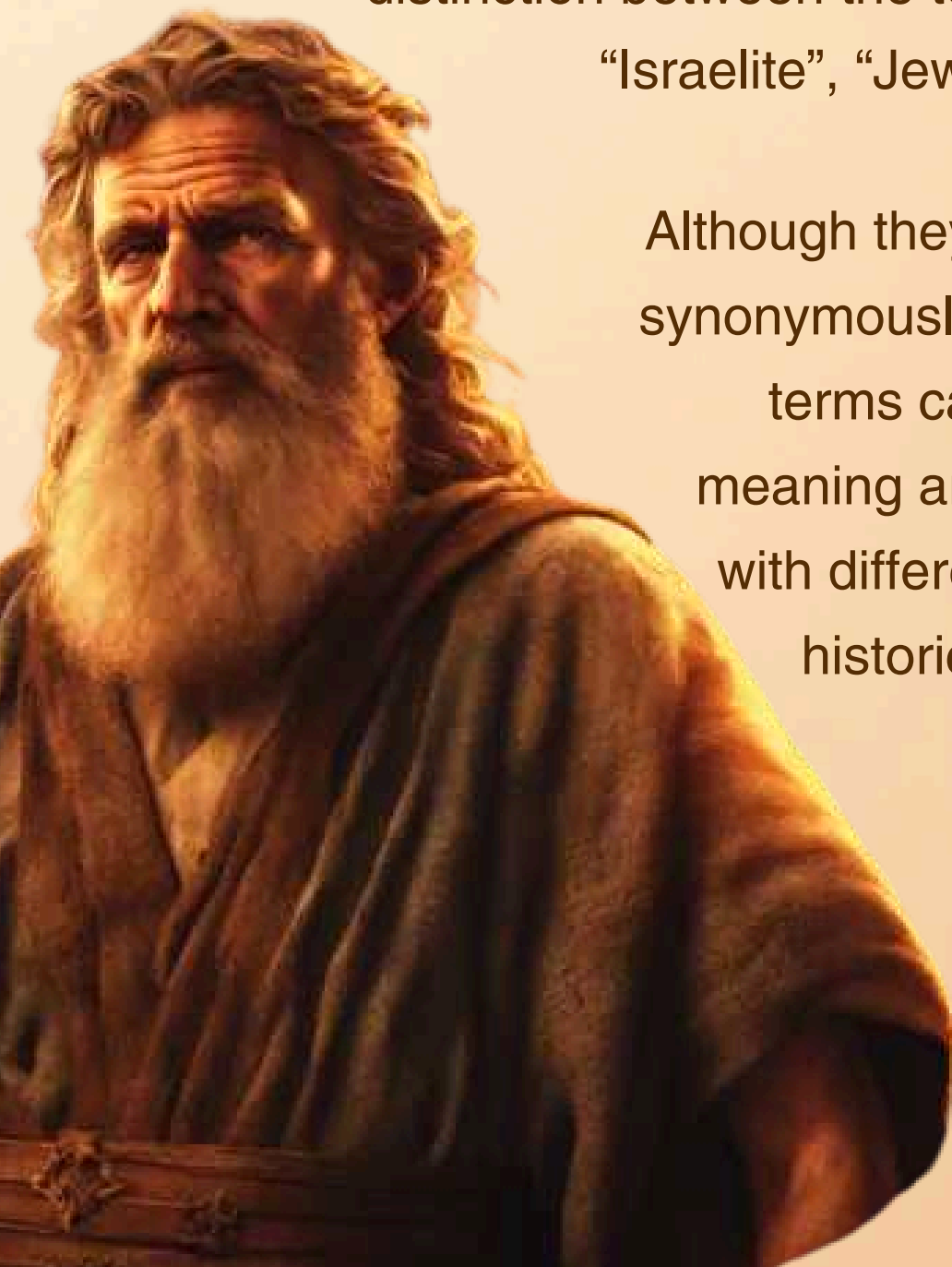
Hebrews: This term is one of the oldest and is used to describe the ancestors of the Jewish people, including biblical figures such as Abraham and Moses, before the formation of the kingdom of Israel. The name "Hebrew" has roots that suggest a condition of "pilgrims" or "people from the other side [of the river]", which reflects the nomadism of the first patriarchs.

Israelites: Refers to the descendants of Jacob, who was also called Israel after a transformative encounter with a divine being. The term "Israelite" covers the period from the people's entry into the Promised Land to the establishment and eventual division of the kingdom into two political entities: Israel and Judah.

Jewishs: originated after the division of the original kingdom into Israel (north) and Judah (south). "Jewish" comes from 'Judah' and initially applied only to the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Judah, which included Jerusalem and the Temple. After the Babylonian exile and dispersion, the term came to describe all those who maintained the religious and cultural identity associated with Judaism, regardless of their tribal origin.

Israeli: This term is modern and refers to citizens of the State of Israel, established in 1948. It does not have a biblical context, but a modern political and geographical one.

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These terms, although related to the same people, reflect different eras, cultural practices and religious developments throughout biblical and post-biblical history. Understanding these distinctions is essential for any detailed study of the people and region described in the Old Testament.
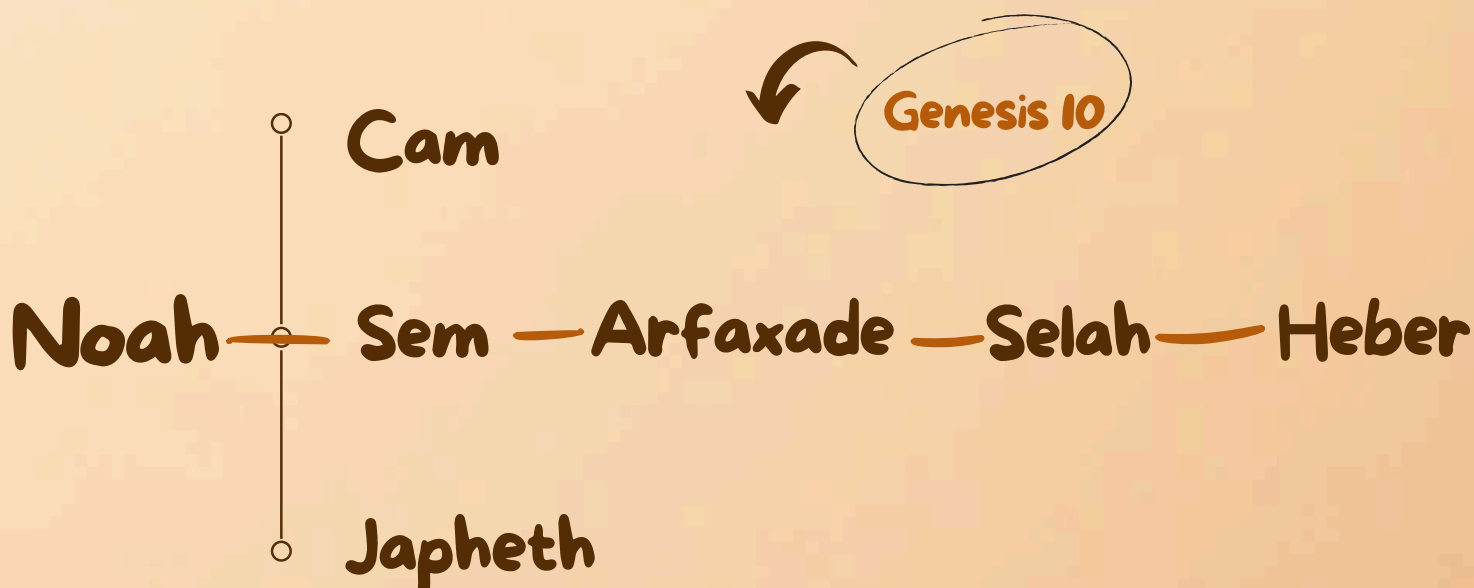
Hebrew

Jewish

Israeli

Israelite

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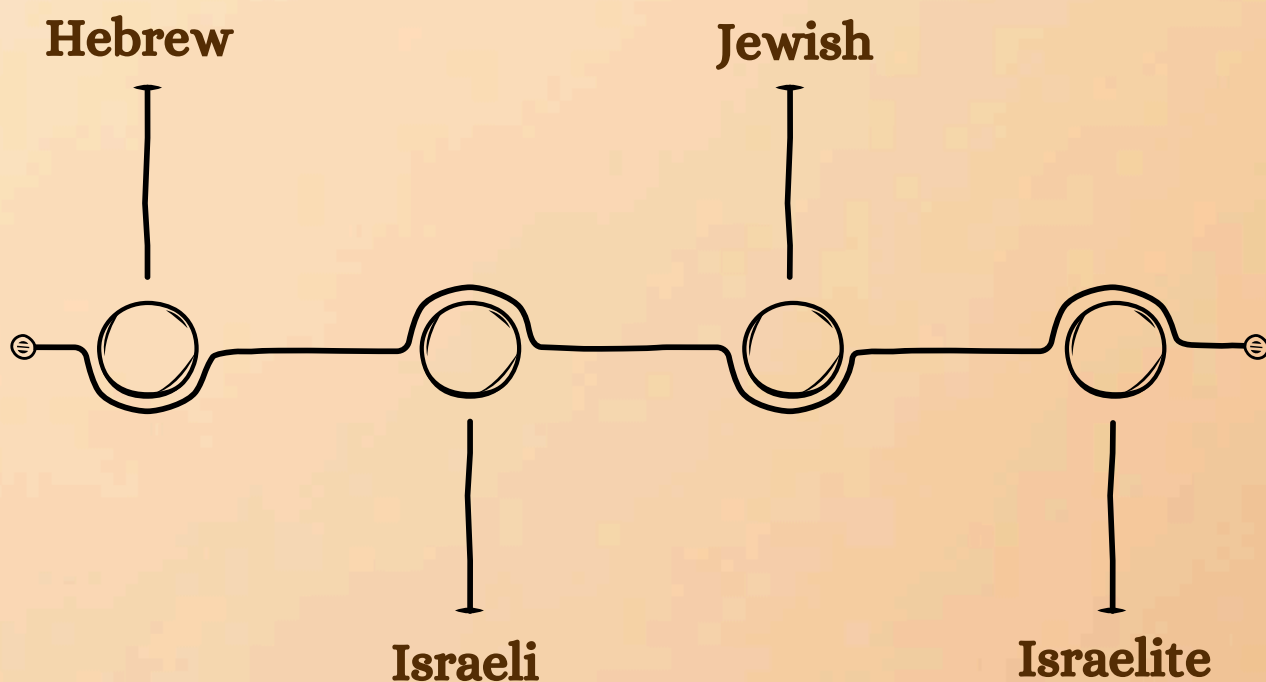
HEBREW

The term "Hebrew" is crucial to understanding the origins and identity of the people described in the Bible. The first mention of the term occurs in Genesis 14:13, where Abram (later Abraham) is called "the Hebrew". This moment not only introduces Abraham as a central figure, but also associates his identity with the term "Hebrew".
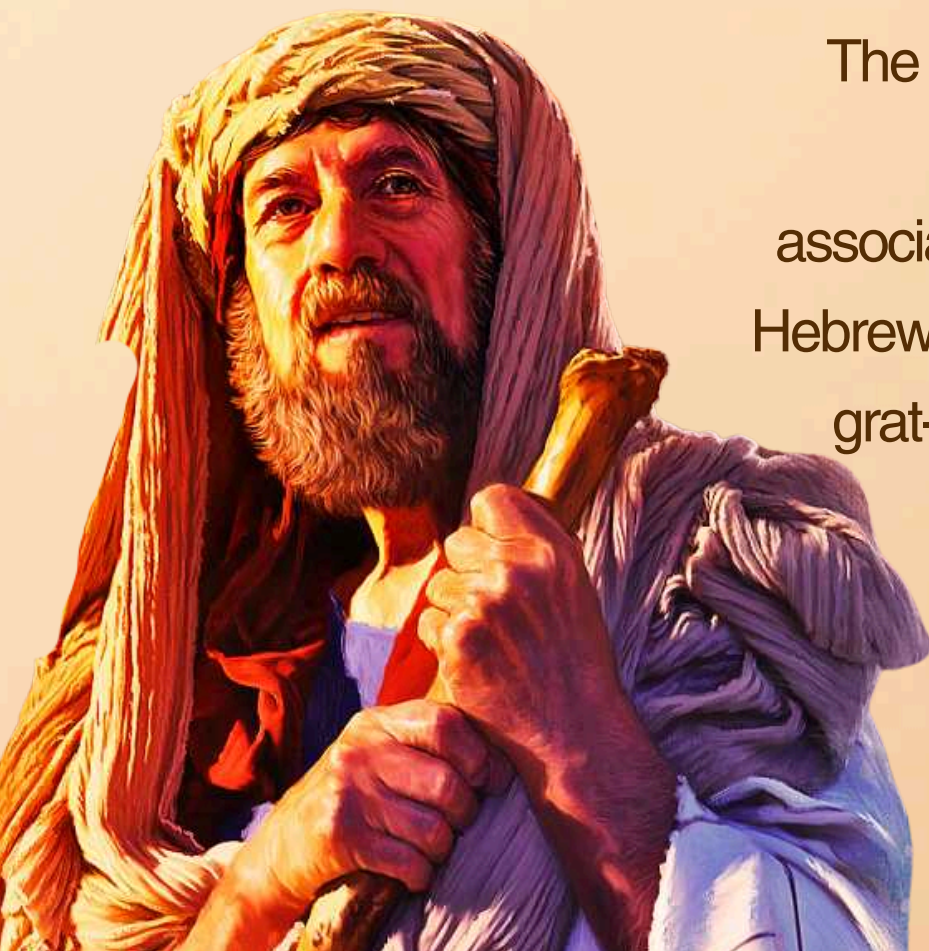
The etymology of the name "Hebrew" is commonly associated with Heber (עֵבֶר in Hebrew), one of Shem's great-grat-grandchildren and Noah's great-great-grandson. According to the biblical narrative in Genesis 10

which details Noah's post-diluvian genealogy, Heber emerges as a figure of considerable importance. Traditionally, it is believed that he played a crucial role in preserving the language his people spoke. This Jewish tradition suggests that while many participated in the construction of the Tower of Babel - an event marked by the confusion of languages as divine punishment - Heber and his family abstained. As a result, the Hebrew language, spoken by Heber and his descendants, was preserved.

Genesis 10

Cam

Noah — Sem — Arfaxade — Selah — Heber

Japheth

This association is not only linguistic, but also cultural and spiritual. The term "Hebrew" not only identifies the people as descendants of Heber, but also as bearers of a particular tradition and faith that would be fundamental to the development of Judaism. Thus, being "Hebrew" meant belonging to a group that maintained a direct spiritual and cultural continuity since the time of Noah, through Shem and Heber.

Therefore, the term "Hebrew" evokes both a genealogical connection and a spiritual and cultural heritage. The Hebrews are therefore the Semitic people descended from Shem and Heber, characterized both by their descent and by their linguistic and cultural distinction in a world that, according to the biblical narratives, was becoming increasingly diverse, complex and distant from the Creator.

ISRAELITE

The term "Israelite" has a rich layer of meaning that is fundamental to understanding the national and historical identity of a people described in the Bible.

Originating from the name "Israel", which was given to Jacob after a transformative event, the term refers to the descendants of the twelve tribes that emerged from his sons. This name therefore encapsulates both a personal and collective evolution, from an individual patriarch to an entire nation.
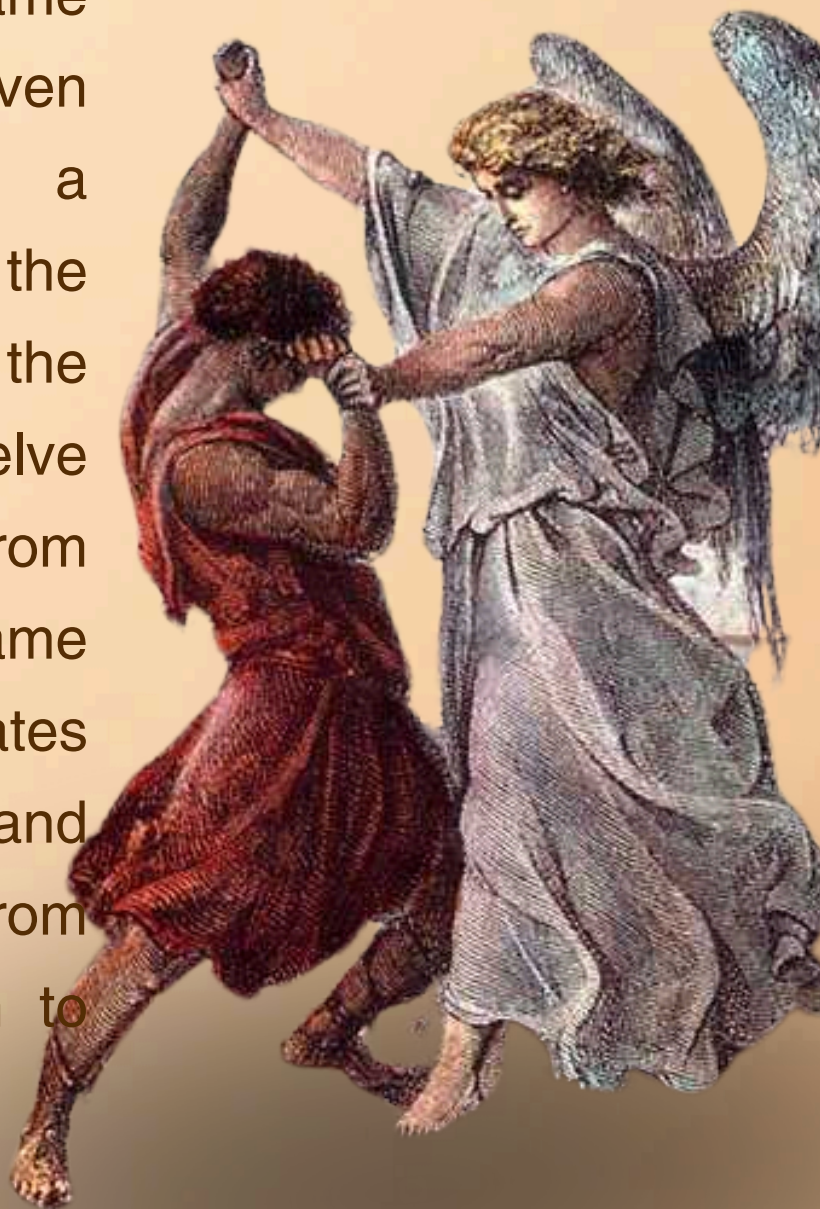
Jacob's transformation into Israel is a crucial moment in the scriptures. According to Genesis 35:9-10, after Jacob returned from Padanaram, God appeared to him and blessed him, changing his name to **Israel**, which means "the one who wrestles with God". This new name symbolizes not only a personal change, but also **foreshadows the destin**y of a people who would have a complex and challenging relationship with the divine.

The **twelve tribes of Israel**, therefore, descend from Jacob-Israel and represent the initial formation of Israelite identity. These tribes, after the miraculous exit from Egypt - an event that solidifies their cohesion as a chosen people - conquer and settle in the Promised Land, forming the Kingdom of Israel. Here, the term "Israelite" takes on connotations of a shared identity based on land, history and faith.

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The difference between Hebrew, Israelite, Jewish and Israeli.

JACOB

God changes the name

ISRAEL

LEAH

Reuben

Simeon

Levi

Judah

Issachar

Zenulon

-

Dinah

ZILPAH

Gade

Asher

RACHEL

Joseph

Benjamin

BILHAH

Dan

Naphtali

*Jacob also had daughters, but the Bible only mentions the name of Dinah.

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The term "Israelite" is frequently used in the Bible (cited more than 600 times) to describe the people in a variety of contexts, reflecting their journey through key events such as the conquest of the Promised Land, the monarchy, the division into two kingdoms and the subsequent exiles and dispersions. Therefore, to be an "Israelite" means to belong to that specific lineage of Jacob, sharing a cultural and religious heritage that defines and distinguishes this group from the surrounding nations.
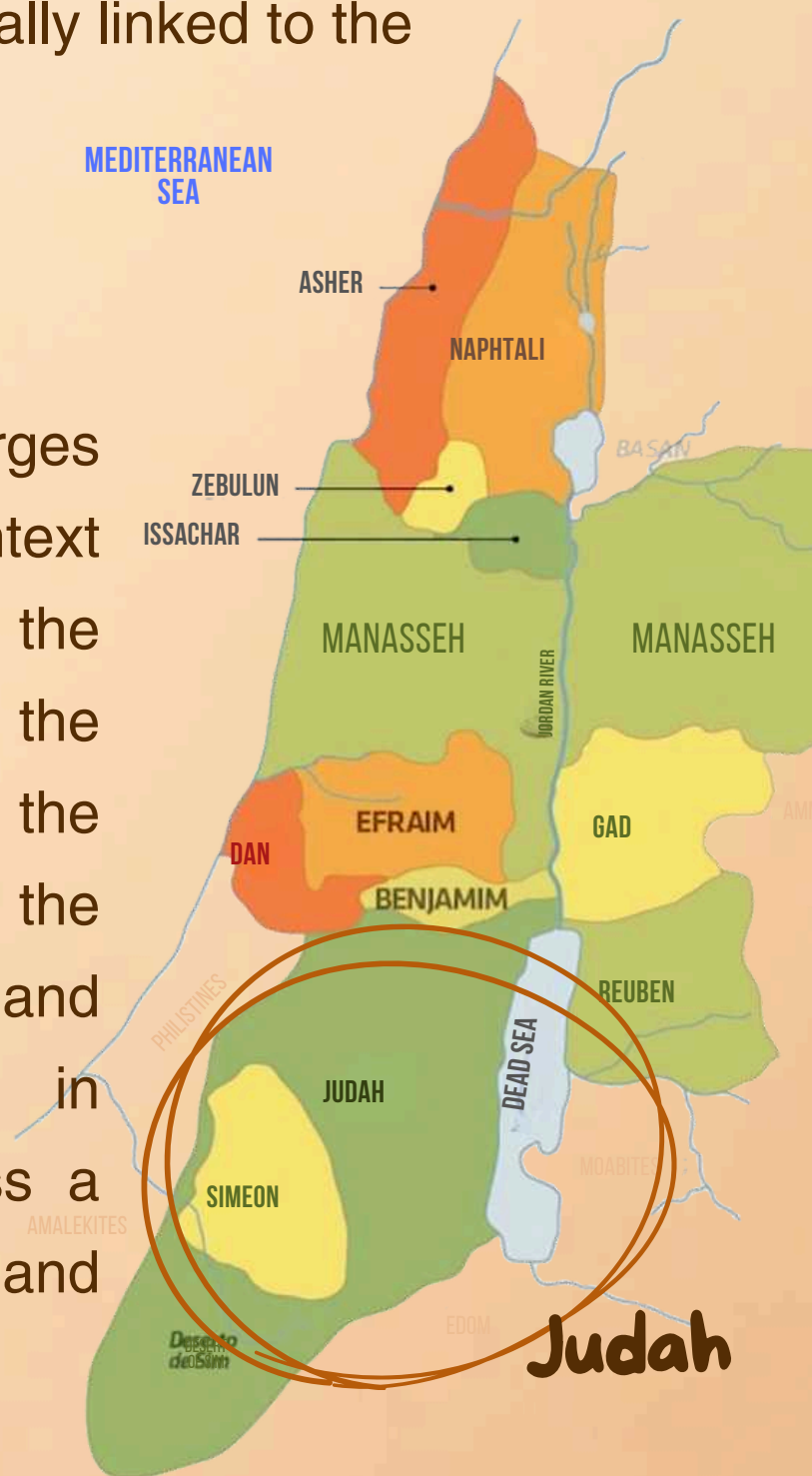
Thus, the term "Israelite" is not just a genealogical indication, but a title that evokes a vast narrative of faith, struggle and perseverance. It represents a people whose history is intrinsically linked to divine promises and to the challenges imposed both by their internal relations and by their confrontations with other cultures and religions over the centuries.

JEWISH

The term "Jewish" is a designation with profound historical, cultural and religious implications, whose origin is intrinsically linked to the political and social evolution of the people of Israel.

This name emerges specifically in the context of the division of the Kingdom of Israel in the 10th century BC, when the southern tribes formed the Kingdom of Judah, and has since evolved in meaning to encompass a broader religious and ethnic identity.

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ASHER

NAPHTALI

BASAN

ZEBULUN

ISSACHAR

MANASSEH

JORDAN RIVER

MANASSEH

EFRAIM

GAD

DAN

BENJAMIM

PHILISTINES

REUBEN

DEAD SEA

JUDAH

MOABITES

SIMEON

AMALEKITES

EDOM

Deserto
deSinin

Judah

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Initially, the term **"Jewish"** was associated exclusively with the inhabitants of the Kingdom of **Judah**, which included the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levi. This identification was both geographical and tribal. However, the nomenclature began to acquire a broader dimension after the collapse of the **Kingdom of Israel** and the subsequent destruction of the **Kingdom of Judah** and the Babylonian exile. During this period, the term began to represent not only the inhabitants of **Judah**, but also the remnants of all the **Israelite** tribes who retained their cultural and religious identity.

The biblical books of **Esther, Nehemiah and Ezra** are crucial to understanding this transition. They document the period after the Babylonian exile, when the exiles returned to the Promised Land and began the process of reconstruction and restoration, both physical and spiritual.

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In this context, the **term "Jewish"** began to be used more broadly to describe all individuals who share a common heritage, regardless of their specific tribal origins. This expansion of the term reflects a reality where individual tribal identity has become less relevant than shared collective and religious identity.

MEDITERRANEAN SEA

ASHER

NAPHTALI

ZEBULUN

ISSACHAR

MANASSEH   MANASSEH

Kingdom of Israel

EFRAIM   GAD

BENJAMIN

**Division of the Kingdom
North (Israel) and South
(Judah)**

REUBEN

JUDAH   DEAD SEA

**Fall of the Northern
Kingdom
and Then the South**

SIMEON

AMALEKITES

**Return from
Captivity**

**Dispersal of the northern
tribes**
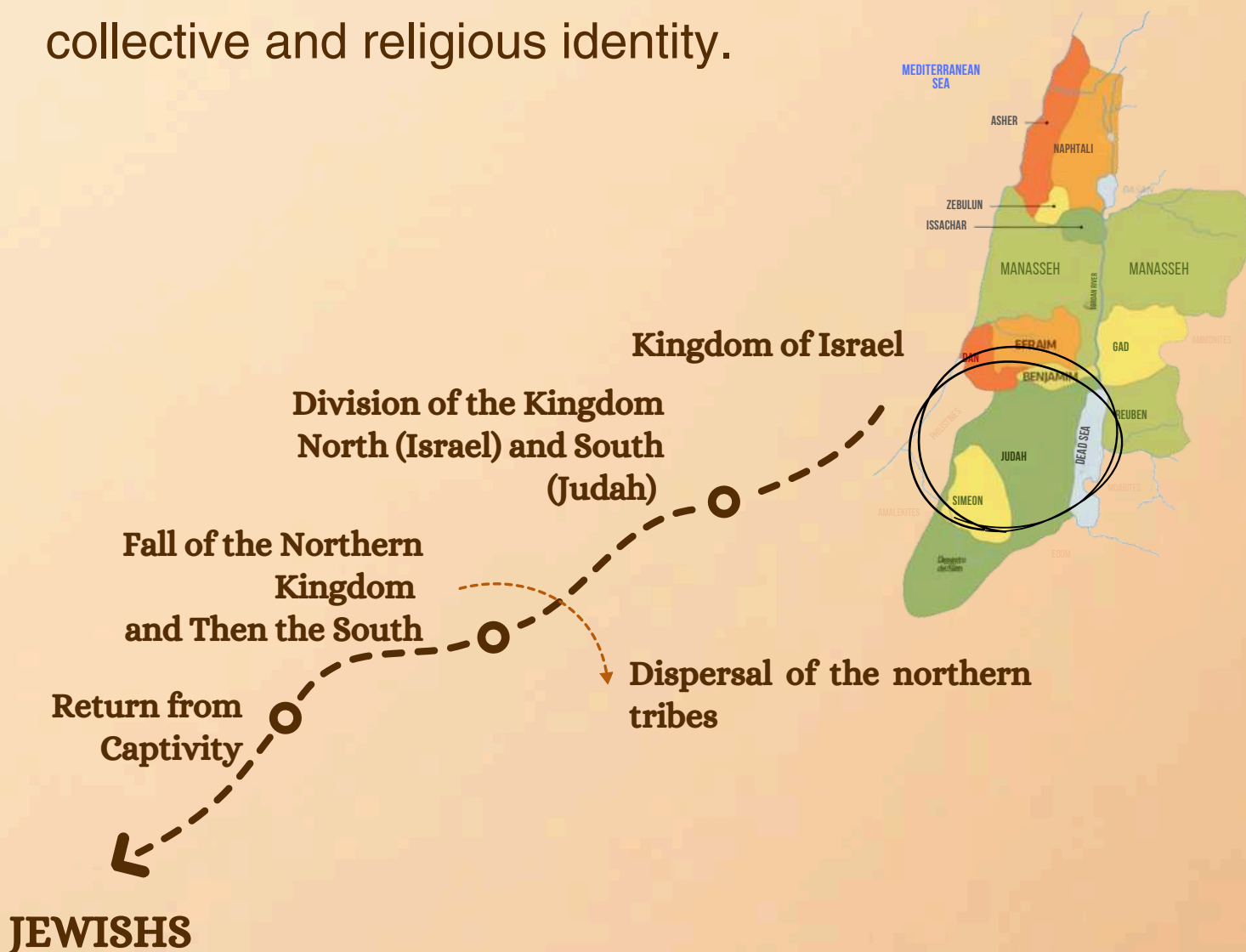
JEWISHS

Furthermore, the prevalence of the tribe of **Judah** during and after the exile is a significant reason for the generalization of the term **"Jewish"**. With the other tribes severely diminished or dispersed, those of Judah emerged as the central core of the remaining Israelite identity. This led to a wider association of the term "**Jewish**" with all those who professed the Jewish faith, consolidating it as both an ethnic and religious designation.

Therefore, "**Jewish**" not only identifies a tribal origin or a geographical location, but also encapsulates a rich tapestry of traditions, religious practices, and the resilience of a people to maintain and cultivate their identity over the centuries, especially in the face of adversity and dispersal. Today, this nomenclature transcends geographical notions and stands as a testament to the ongoing preservation and practice of Judaism, a central component of Jewish identity.

ISRAELI

he term "Israeli" refers to the citizens of the modern State of Israel, a nation established in 1948 on the territory that historically housed the ancient Kingdom of Israel and the Kingdom of Judah. This term has a primarily political and geographical connotation, detached from the religious or ethnic identifications that characterize the terms "Hebrew", "Israelite" and "Jewish".

The formation of the State of Israel was deeply influenced by the events of the 20th century, especially the Holocaust,
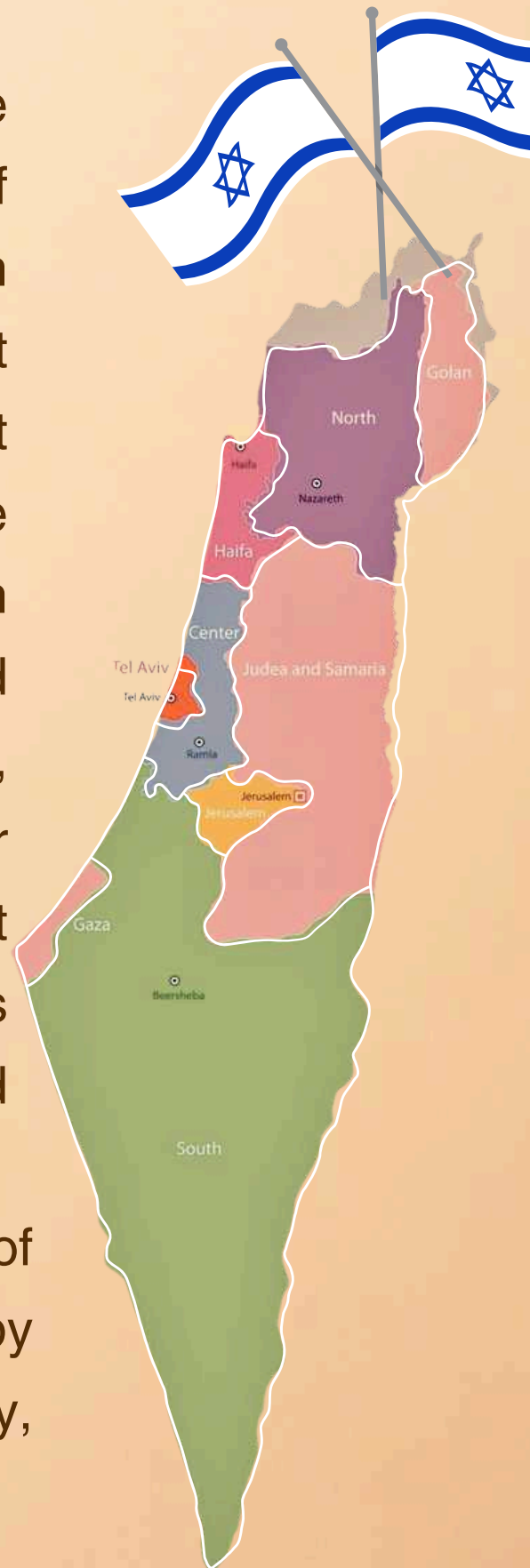
which resulted in the systematic extermination of six million Jewishs by Nazi Germany. **The need for a secure national home for the Jewish people**, where they could exercise their right to self-determination, was a crucial factor in the establishment of Israel. The declaration of the state's independence was a defining moment, marking the rebirth of a Jewish nation in its historic ancestral territory, but with the outlines of a modern nation-state.

Israelis, therefore, are **defined by citizenship** and not necessarily by religious affiliation. While the majority of Israelis are Jewish, Israeli society is diverse and includes Arabs (both Muslims and Christians), Druze, Bedouins, and other ethnic and religious minorities.

This diversity reflects the social and political complexity of the modern State of Israel, where national identity is influenced, but not limited, by Jewish heritage.

This distinction is essential to understanding the nature of the term "**Israeli**" in contrast to "**Jewish**". While **"Jewish"** can imply an ethnic or religious connection, "Israeli" is an exclusively national term that transcends religion and reflects citizenship within the modern State of Israel. Israeli identity, therefore, encompasses a plurality of religions and ethnicities, united under the sovereignty of a contemporary, democratic state, distinctly separate from biblical identities, yet geographically and historically connected to them.

CONCLUSION

Understanding the differences between the terms "Hebrew", "Israelite", "Jewish" and "Israeli" is fundamental for an in-depth and enriching study of the scriptures and biblical history, as well as for understanding the contemporary contexts related to the State of Israel.
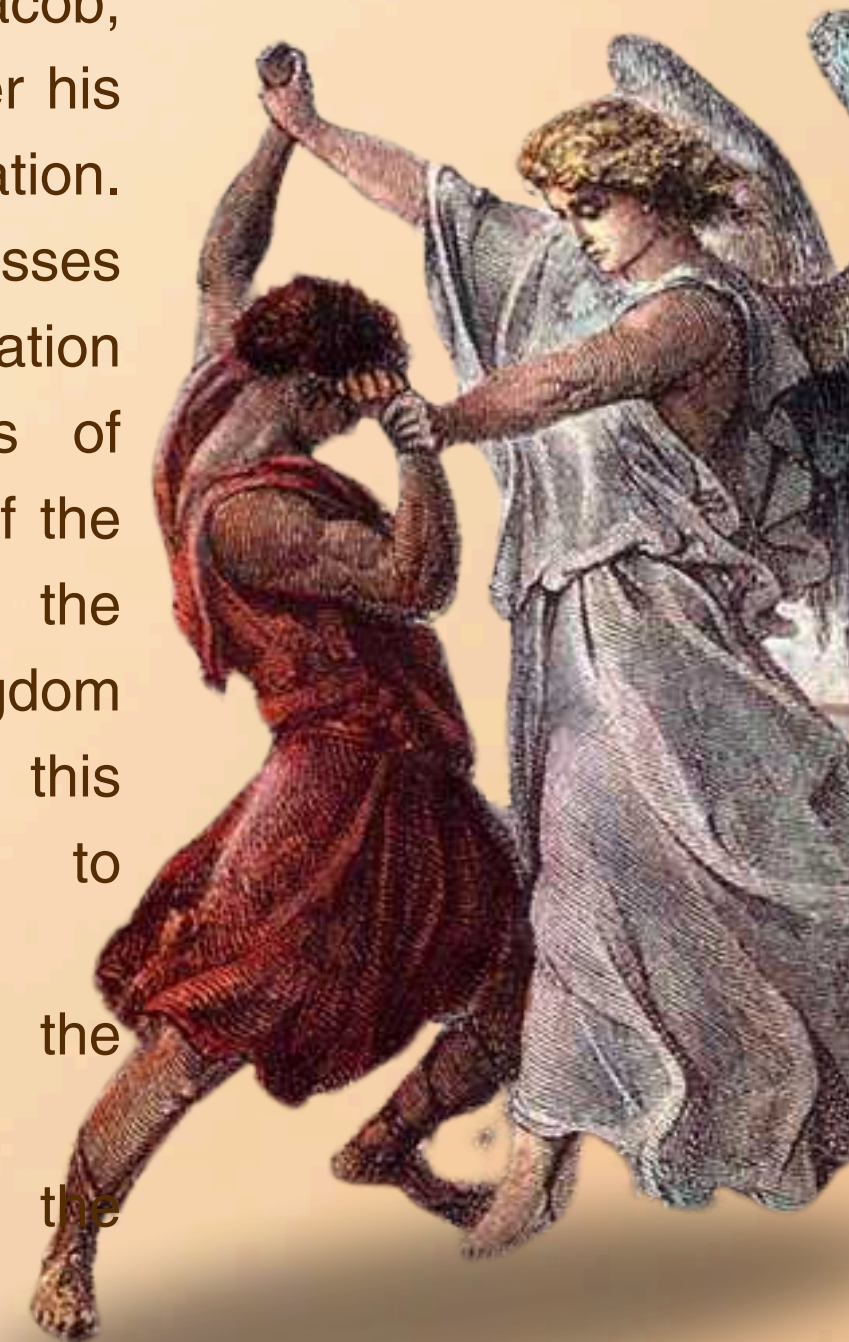
HEBREW

This term goes back to the first ancestors of the Jewish people, such as Abraham, and is associated with the oldest aspects of the nomadic identity and linguistic and cultural origins of this people. Understanding this term helps to understand the roots and initial faith of the patriarchs.
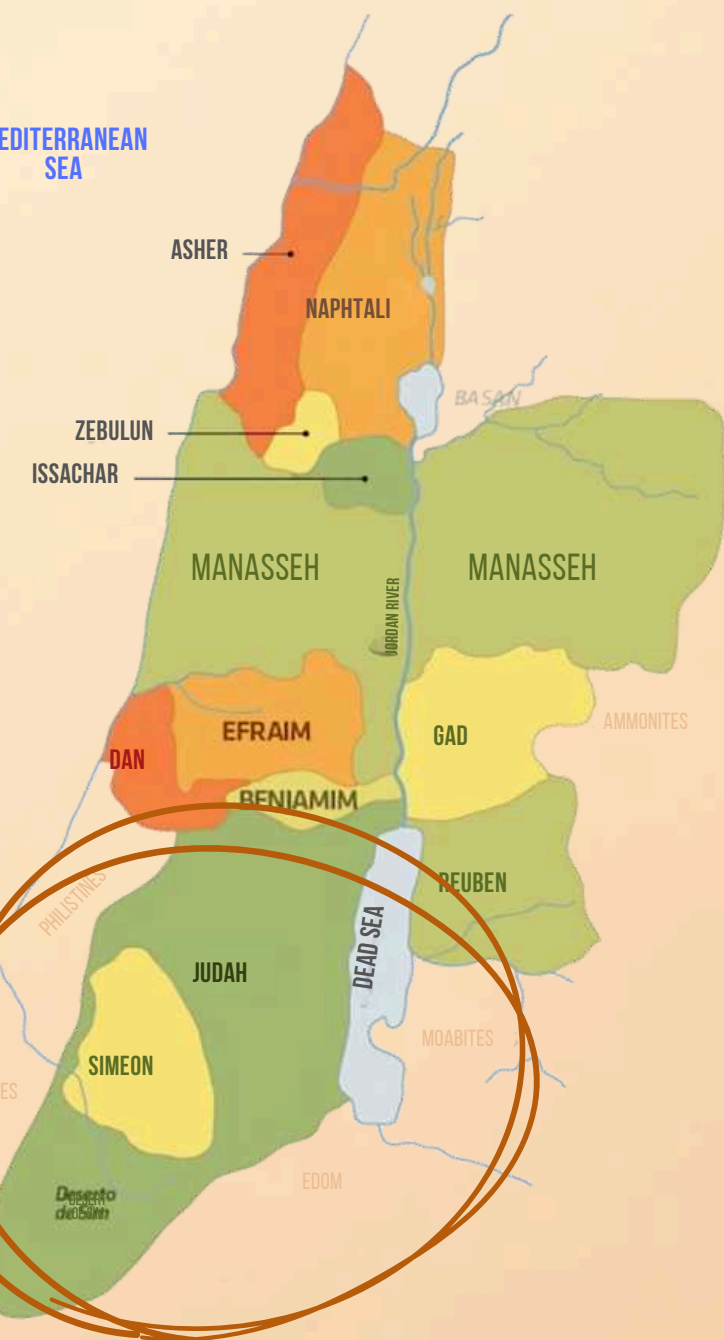
ISRAELITE

It refers specifically to the descendants of Jacob, also called Israel, after his spiritual transformation. This term encompasses the period of the formation of the twelve tribes of Israel, the conquest of the Promised Land and the existence of the Kingdom of Israel. Recognizing this phase is crucial to understanding the development of the nation and identity under the covenant with God.

JEWISH

MEDITERRANEAN
SEA

ASHER

NAPHTALI

ZEBULUN

ISSACHAR

BASAN

MANASSEH

MANASSEH

JORDAN RIVER

EFRAIM

GAD

AMMONITES

DAN

BENIAMIM

PHILISTINES

REUBEN

DEAD SEA

JUDAH

MOABITES

SIMEON

EDOM

Deserto
de Sinn

Initially linked to the inhabitants of the Kingdom of Judah, this term has evolved to represent anyone who professes the Jewish religion, regardless of their original tribe. This understanding is essential to appreciate how Judaism has been preserved and transformed over the centuries, especially in contexts of exile and diaspora.

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ISRAELI

A modern term for the citizens of the State of Israel, established in 1948. This term highlights the diversity of the modern State of Israel, which, although geographically situated in the historic land of Israel, is politically and culturally distinct from the ancient entities.

Distinguishing these terms not only enriches the understanding of the biblical narratives, but also promotes a more accurate understanding of the historical and modern complexities of the region. Such discernment allows scholars, believers and readers of scripture to connect in a deeper and more informed way with the spiritual and historical traditions that have shaped, and continue to shape, a people's identity over millennia.

God bless you!