



A SERVICE FOR MEMBERS ONLY.

*Covenant Answering Service*



Produced by The Federation of the Covenant People,  
P.O.Box 830, Honeydew, 2040, SOUTH AFRICA.

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Issue No. 1

September 1982.

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### Introductory Explanation

This Service, available to all Members of the Federation, is designed to answer the many and increasing number of questions relating to scriptural matters which have accompanied the vast volume of correspondence received by the Federation. It has become impossible to answer each question personally – much as one would like to do this – and so it has been decided to issue this Covenant Answering Service as often as is practicable. Apart from being aimed at satisfying whoever has asked a question, this Service seeks to share with others – in a broad fellowship of enquiry – the answers to questions sent in. We would like to stress however, that this Service is **ONLY** available to Members of the Federation.

**QUESTION:** In the course of our Bible study, we have found that the chapter/verse divisions have often left many in our group with a sense of frustration – that of Matthew 16:28 being a particular bone of contention. I know and have explained that the original text had none of these and that the divisions and punctuation are man's attempt to simplify the reading of the Bible, but could you give me some historical data on how this came about?

**ANSWER:** Before considering the present divisions of the various Books of the New Testament into chapters and verses, it is necessary to follow the history of the transmission of the writings which were canonised and used for instruction.

The first feature to be noted in this context is that none of the original writings are in existence today. It is generally conceded that the material used in the early days of Christianity was papyrus and that because of frequent use, these soon wore out and were replaced by others. It is because of this fact i.e. none of the originals are available today, that one finds most commentators using the word "probably" when attempting to explain the early transmission of the writing of those early days.

It has been assumed that the earliest writings were written in *uncial* or large capital letters without any division of words, without punctuation and without any accents and certainly without any subtitles which characterise the present Authorised Version. Attempts to indicate a punctuation began in the 4th or the 5th Century when one finds that a simple point was added or a small blank space was allowed to be followed somewhat later by the practice of writing short lines to impart the sense of punctuation. The author of this was Euthalius of Alexandria who applied this principle to the Epistles and the Acts and later to the Gospels. However, as vellum which replaced the earlier papyrus was so costly, this means of punctuation — if it could be called this — was discontinued. This same Euthalius whose work is attributed to the last half of the 5th Century, was also responsible for dividing the Acts and the Epistles into chapters although Ammonius of Alexandria (220 A.D.) is said to have tried to divide the Gospels into chapters with very little success. The chapter-divisions by Euthalius were very different from those which appear in the modern Bible and one is able to see that from that time, copyists were involved in a succession of changes which finally presented the Bible in its present form. The practice of providing sub-titles too was begun by Euthalius who limited this to the Epistles of Paul and which today, appear very much as he appended them.

Before passing to comparatively modern times and the author of the present form of chapters and verses, it would serve to note that in addition to the external changes which took place when men sought to provide the text in chapter/verse and punctuation form, certain internal changes were also made. While the copyists were attempting to make the reading of the various Books somewhat easier and one should remember that even after the canon became fixed, the manuscript of the *whole* New Testament or of the whole Greek Bible was extremely rare, while copyists were involved in this, they inadvertently made some changes in the text as well. In some instances, particularly when an early copyist was attempting to communicate punctuation by writing short lines and wrote explanatory notes in the

margin, one finds that a later copyist incorporated these notes into the text itself. It should be stated however, that these copyists were not guilty of deliberate falsification — they did what they did in all sincerity believing that it was the right and proper thing to do. As there were no hard and fast rules governing the duty of a copyist and certainly no strict rule by which their work was measured, those copyist errors have today become accepted as scripture.

A modern example of alteration to the text would serve here. If one considers the Authorised Version of Mark 7:19 it will be noted that it is written as: "Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?" It should be remembered that the above verse is being cited to illustrate the point of textual alteration and not an explanation of the text itself. In passing to the Revised Standard Version (1952 Edition) and its translation of this verse, it will be noted that the last three words in Mark 7:19 in the Authorised Version have been replaced, in parenthesis it is true, by the words "(Thus he declared all foods clean)". In passing to the 1970 Edition of the New English Bible, it will be seen that the evidence of parenthesis inserted by the Revised Standard Version editors has been dropped and the words: "Thus he declared all foods clean", have become an integral part of the text.

In returning to the question which prompted this brief history, namely, can any data be provided as to when the present chapter/verse divisions of the Bible took place, all that can be said is that while many attempts were made at an early age in this direction, it remained for Cardinal Hugo of St. Carus in the 13th Century to provide the present structure. Insofar as the present verse system is concerned, while the author is unknown, the verses in their present form appeared for the first time in an edition of the Bible printed by Robert Stephens in 1551.

Without all the efforts through the years to divide the various texts into chapters and verses, and if one looks at that "bone of contention" — Matthew 16:28 — as it was before any attempt was made to alter the

structure of the writing, one finds it reading as follows. "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him." The artificial inclusion of chapter 17 in this text was an unfortunate division which interrupted and divorced what the Lord said from the fulfilment of this and has tended to create confusion in those who limit their study of the Bible to chapters alone.

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#### HEBREW – ISRAELITE – JEW

**QUESTION:** The people here (in the U.S.A.) believe there is no difference between the Jew and the Hebrew. Sunday School teachers and preachers speak of Abraham the Jew; they speak of the Jewish Laws and Feast days, etc., Moses the Jew and "the Jews came out of the Egyptian bondage". What should I do about this?

**ANSWER:** In the first instance, before doing anything, one should be fully conversant with Biblical definitions of the terms used in any discussion. In the above question, it is more than apparent that the "teachers and preachers" have their own definition of the meaning of "Hebrew" and "Jew" and the only practical way in which their definitions can be countered is by thoroughly researching both subjects, equipping oneself with all the *facts* provided in the Bible and then contrasting what is taught with all this.

One should begin one's research from the base as it were by considering the *English* word "Hebrew" remembering that, with the word "Jew", it is a *translation* and not as it was written in the earlier manuscripts. The English word "Hebrew" is translated from "Ibri" which, in the Bible, is used as a proper name for the great-grandson of Shem,

the son of Noah, who was called Eber (Gen. 11:11-14) and is also used to designate a district or an area as in the case of Joshua 24:2. In this, Joshua indicated that the ancestors of the Israelites dwelt beyond the river Euphrates or, as it is in the A.V. "on the other side of the flood" – the word "Ibri" is used here and in most other usages indicates that the word means "that which is beyond". In Numbers 24:24 it is stated: "And ships shall come from the coast of Chittim (Kition, on the island of Cyprus), and shall afflict Asshur (Assyria), and shall afflict Eber (Ibri), and he shall perish for ever." Here, "Eber" is seen to designate a country in the neighbourhood of Assyria and possibly part of it – a country beyond the Euphrates in which region one finds Haran, the region to which Abraham and his family migrated after leaving Ur of the Chaldees (Gen. 11:31).

Abraham is of course, the first in the Bible to be called a "Hebrew" (Gen. 14:13) and is written as Abraham, ha-ibri which *could* indicate his descent from Eber but which in all probability indicated his association with other descendants of Shem who were located in the north-east region beyond the river Euphrates. It will of course be recalled that in seeking a wife for Isaac, Abraham instructed his servant to "go unto *my country*, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:4) and in turn, Isaac commanded Jacob that he should go to Padan-aram to seek a wife and significantly, one of the additional sons of Shem not listed in Genesis 11 is stated to be Aram in Genesis 10:22. From all the evidence available at the moment, it would appear that Abraham's identification as a "Hebrew" or more correctly "Ibri" was derived from the fact that the sons of Shem settled themselves in the region which was beyond the river and whom, in Nuzian-Hittite and El-Amarna documents of the 15th and 14th Centuries are referred to as the "Habiri" who began to spread themselves abroad. Thus, in respect of this word "Ibri" or "Hebrew" in English, one finds that while it *could*, but by no means proven, indicate a descendant of Shem, in all probability it indicated those sons of Shem who congregated in the north-east region of the source of the Euphrates, but

who later dispersed making for regions unknown.

While archaeological evidence relating to those days speaks of the "Habiri" and while the Bible uses the term "Hebrew" to differentiate between the Israelites and other people, no word having any association with the English word "Jew" has been found nor is there any such word found in the Bible to suggest that "Hebrew" and "Jew" are synonymous. The first occasion on which the word "Jew" appears in the Bible is recorded in 2nd Kings 16:6 and if this account is considered, it will be seen that under no circumstances could this word be inter-changed with that of "Israel". Verse 5 in this chapter indicates that Rezin, the king of Syria and Pekah, the king of Israel were joined in confederacy against Jerusalem and "At that time Rezin king of Syria recovered Elath to Syria, and drove the Jews from Elath..." The English translation of "Jews" in this instance, is taken from the Hebrew *Yehudiy* which had a rather wide application at that time. This word is derived from *Yehudah*, the name given to the fourth son of Jacob — Judah — and was applied firstly to the descendants of the patriarch and secondly to the country or territory occupied by that tribe and lastly, because the Law of the LORD was violated, to *any subject* of the kingdom of Judah, once the division of the twelve tribes had taken place. At that time, Elath was the possession of the Edomites who had become subject to the kingdom of Judah and as *subjects*, these Edomites whom Rezin drove out, were called *Yehudiy*.

Before proceeding, it would serve, in terms of Biblical definitions, to ask the teachers and preachers how they could possibly hold that Abraham was a *Yehudiy* when the source of this name — *Yehudah* — was used for the *first time* three generations after he had died? Further, they should be asked how it is possible, when tribal identity was held to be so important, Moses, who was a *Levite* should be called by a name which was associated with another tribe? A further question to the teachers and preachers is: "By what authority does theology profess to take the name of the fourth son of Jacob — certainly not the first-born — and identify the other eleven as descendants of

Judah? Such reasoning brings the whole Bible story into disrepute.

According to Ezra, 42 360 of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin returned from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 2:64) and because Judah was the more numerous of the returned captives, the province of the Persian Empire to which they returned, took its name from that of Judah. It became the province of Judaea and all its citizens, irrespective of their origins were called Judaeans. As none of the captives taken in the Assyrian invasion of the northern kingdom of *Israel* are numbered by Ezra, it would be less than honest to call them Judaeans or Jews. As one continues with the Book of Ezra, it will be seen that nine other, *named people* had taken up residence in "Judaea" (Ezra 4:9) and under the Persian, and later Greek administration of the territory, all these people came to be known as Judaeans although, as is patently obvious, none of them could claim any identity with the remnant of the tribes of Judah which returned.

At a much later stage, the Lord Jesus Christ, in His Revelation to John, saw fit to warn of the "blasphemy of them which say they are Jews (*Yehudiy*) and are not, but are of the synagogue of Satan" (Rev. 2:9). Those who profess to teach and preach the Word of God should know that the English "blasphemy" in this context is translated from the Greek *blasphemia* and means "evil speaking" and "vilification". If it was "evil speaking" for those Judaeans to claim to be of the tribe of Judah, what condemnation awaits those who, looking at the heterogeneous people who call themselves by this name today, reduce all the tribes of Israel to the same level? If there are any of Judah within the Khazar-dominated entity of Jews today, their percentage would be less than one percent. It is therefore ludicrous to teach and preach that all Israel are involved in this word "Jew".

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