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Black Hebrew Israelites

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A profile on the Black Hebrew Israelite movement:

Founder: Various leaders for different sects. There is no primary leader today. First started in the United States before the Civil War.

Headquarters: Various major cities across the United States with state chapters. There does not appear to be a central headquarter of leadership for the movement.

Membership: Approximately 200,000 among the dozens of offshoot branches.

Approximately 50,000 Black Hebrews, while the number who follow some form of Judaism (broadly defined) could be up to 200,000. There is a vast amount of diversity amongst various groups who claim to be descendants of the ancient Israelites. It is difficult to distinguish between all the various offshoots and movements within the broad movement of "Black Jewish Identity." Therefore, the range of possible adherents could be between 40,000-200,000.

Origins: One sect originated before the Civil War. There was another sect founded later in 1896, the Church of God and Saints of Christ, by William Crowdy. In the 1980s other sects began to appear, such as those lead by Yahweh Ben Yahweh (1935 – 2007), or Hulon Mitchell, Jr. There are a number of other sects of this broad Hebrew Israelite movement known as the Commandment Keepers, The Law Keepers, House of Judah, and the African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, just to name a few.¹

Practices:

1. Some groups stand on the street corners of major cities and condemn people for their allegedly false beliefs while using vulgar language.² The Hebrew

Israelites are very combative and generally do not want to listen when their views are challenged.³

2. They frequently use Hebrew words such as Yah [the name of God, Yahweh, shortened as Yah], Yahoshua [Jesus], Shabbat [Sabbath], etc.
3. They keep the Jewish Sabbath and many other Jewish customs including circumcision, dietary laws, and the observance of certain Jewish holidays and festivals like Yom Kippur and Passover.
4. They use the Old and New Testament to support their teachings, especially the five books of Moses (Genesis to Deuteronomy).
5. They do not consider themselves to be Jews in the modern sense of the term as associated with Orthodox, Reformed, Conservative, or Hasidic Judaism.

Source of Authority: It is difficult to determine where these Hebrew Israelites get their ultimate source of authority since they do not have any official writings. They apparently view the Bible (both the Old and New Testaments), preferably the King James Version, as an authoritative source, but they just argue that there have been a number of mistranslations. Nevertheless, some hint that the canon of the Bible is not fixed. They apparently use other writings outside of the Bible to support their ideas, such as the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (meaning literally “false writings”).

Teachings:

Generally, the Black Hebrew Israelites teach that certain groups of black are the descendants of ancient Israelites and that white people (especially those in Israel today) are not true descendants. Some BHI's adhere to the Talmud (Jewish collection of teachings, laws, and interpretations based on Genesis through Deuteronomy) while others do not. A very small fraction is racist and considers white people to be evil. Most Black Hebrew Israelites are peaceable and oppose racism.

Following are some of the teachings that many Black Hebrew Israelites affirm. However, there is no universal consensus on all of these points, nor is this an exhaustive summary of all their beliefs. Not all divisions within the movement hold to all these teachings since there is a vast diversity in the movement that has no official creed.

1. God

1. The Trinity is a false teaching.

2. God's true name is Yah as found in Psalm 68:4.

2. Jesus

1. There is no consensus on who the Messiah is: The true name of the Messiah in the New Testament is Yahshuah Ben Yah (Yahshuah the son of Yah). According to their website, there is no universal agreement regarding who the Messiah is. It is not a central component of what defines them as Hebrew Israelites.⁴
2. Virgin Birth: "Yahshuah the Messiah was an Israelite but He had no earthly father, so what made him an Israelite? He was born through the womb of an Israelite woman."⁵

3. Salvation

1. Salvation is only possible by calling on the true name of Jesus in Hebrew, which is Yahshuah Ben Yah (Yahshuah the son of Yah). "You have to call upon him by his Yah given Hebrew name, as it states in Acts 4:12 no other name can be a substitute, no translation of his name. Only his true name given from Heaven which can be spoken in every language, is your key to salvation."⁶
2. Also, John 3:18 says that you are condemned if you do not believe in the name of the only begotten Son.

4. Relationship to Judaism

1. It is necessary to keep the Sabbath and observe various Jewish laws.
2. The Talmud is not God's revelation.

5. Hell

1. Hell is a metaphor and is not a literal place where people suffer.
2. There is no heaven and hell. There is no place where people burn. We are in the caucasian heaven now⁷.

6. Black People

1. Black people are the true Israelites from the tribe of Judah. They argue this from various passages in the Old Testament including Deuteronomy 28 (cf. Leviticus 26) which references ships (Deut. 28:68), serving in bondage (Deut. 28:48), mockery (28:37), and being defeated before one's enemies (28:25). Also, Lamentations 5:10 describes the Israelites who had skin as black as an oven. Therefore, to the Hebrew Israelites, this is conclusive proof that the original Israelites were black.
2. Hispanics, Native Americans, and Negroes are the real Israelites (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI1Zdt031r8>). The Jews are the Negroes in America. The Jews are one tribe of people from Judah. The Twelve Tribes

of Israel are divided up into various ethnic groups in amongst Hispanics, Native Americans, and Negroes.

3. Many of the popular people in history were black, including Moses, Pharoah, certain Roman emperors, etc.⁸
4. Jesus was black.

7. White People

1. White people are seen as conspirators who attempt to persecute the black people and hide their true identity as Israelites. Many Black Hebrew Israelites see white people as almost subhuman.
2. People on this earth are in the caucasian heaven right now since white people are dominating this world and subjugating black people.

8. The Bible

1. There are other books that belong in the Bible, including the Apocrypha and the Pseudepigrapha (especially the Book of Enoch and the Book of Jasher).
2. The King James Version is the best translation of the Bible, but there are mistranslations in it including the removal of Yah, etc. When quoting Romans 9:4-5, the author freely substitutes the Hebrew *Yah* for the Greek *Theos*: "Romans 9:4 Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of **Yah**, and the promises; 5 Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Messiah came, who is over all, **Yah** blessed for ever. Amen." What gives him the right to substitute Yah in these passages? There is virtually no textual support in all of the thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament for such a reading of Romans 9:4-5.

9. Eschatology (End Times)

1. The Hebrew Israelites have some interesting views regarding the end times or eschatology. According to many of them, Luke 21:24 with its reference to the "times of the Gentiles" is actually a reference to the times of the Europeans. When the Messiah returns, all Israel (meaning black people) will be gathered back to the promised land near Israel of today.

No Official Canon of Scripture

The Black Hebrew Israelites appear to allow for the idea that there are other books that should be in the Canon of Scripture, or are at least as authoritative as the sixty-six books in the Bible. There are other books that belong in the Bible, such as the book of Enoch.⁹ They base this argument upon the fact that the book of Jude in the

New Testament alludes to the book of Enoch. However, there are good reasons to believe that only the sixty-six books of the Bible are authoritative. First, Jesus quoted the entire 24 books of the Hebrew Canon by referring to Abel [the first martyr in Genesis] to Zechariah [the last martyr in Chronicles] (Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:51). These twenty-four books of the Hebrew Bible correspond exactly with the number of books found in standard Protestant Bibles today, which is 39. The Jews just arranged their books differently. Second, there are no references to “thus says the Lord” or “the Scripture says,” etc., by Jesus to any of the non-canonical Old Testament passages. Since Jesus claimed to be divine and supported that claim by rising from the dead, it is reasonable to believe what Jesus taught. Therefore, the book of Enoch and other such works, while they may have some accurate teachings, are not inspired by God.

Publications:

In 21st century American culture, where black people have suffered greatly and continue to endure difficult social and cultural hardships, it is not surprising that many African American men turn to such systems of thought as espoused by the Black Hebrew Israelites. Many African American men are in prison. Many African American’s continue to receive prejudice from white people and those of other races. While the Civil Rights Movement of the 60’s has provided liberation for many black people, it has not reduced all social tensions and blatant racism that still prevails in America and internationally. As a result of these many hardships black people face, the ideas espoused by the Hebrew Israelites serve to empower and liberate them from their destitute condition....at least so they think.

A Response to Some of the Teachings of the Hebrew Israelites

Black Hebrew Israelites, please read this first

If you identify yourself as a Hebrew Israelite and you are reading this website, I invite you to please investigate what we are discussing here. We do not hate the precious people who claim to be Black Hebrew Israelites.

Jesus said, “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free,” (John 8:32). He also said, “...I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me,” (John 14:6). My goal in writing this section is to point you to the

truth found in the person of Jesus Christ. He claimed to be the only way to God. If one has a false view of Jesus or minimizes who Jesus claimed to be, this group cannot be following God.

These issues are of eternal significance. How we view God will affect how we view everything else in our lives. A false god and a false Jesus will only provide you with a false salvation. Please understand that I am a white man and my heart is to see God's love and forgiveness provided to all people of every tribe, tongue, and nation. I do not hate black people, nor do I hate any Black Hebrew Israelites. My hope and plea is to accurately represent the teachings of the Black Hebrew Israelite movement and provide polite, loving responses to any of these false teachings.

I do not claim to have perfect knowledge of the teachings and ideas of the many people who identify themselves as Black Hebrew Israelites. I have done my best to accurately represent a very diverse group. I take complete responsibility for any mistakes that I may have made in representing the Black Hebrew Israelites. I welcome your questions, thoughts, and concerns. If I have misrepresented the BHI viewpoint, please do not hesitate to contact us with documentation.

May God bless you with His Truth!

Ryan Turner

Error #1a: Racism

While many Black Hebrew Israelites do not claim to be racists, or to hate someone based on skin color, in practice, these Hebrew Israelites do not act this way. On street corners, they frequently accuse people of other races as being backward, wicked, or even subhuman. All of the Black Hebrew Israelite teachings on white people indicate that they are not valued as highly by God.

However, this is not the teaching of the New Testament in which God loves the whole world (John 3:16). While he certainly chose Israel as a nation and called Abraham, God still had a special love and compassion for all the people of the earth. Furthermore, Galatians 3:28 teaches, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." The New Testament is not a special book for a certain race of people, but a book for all people everywhere. Jesus sent the apostles into the ends of the earth

(Acts 1:8) to make disciples of all nations (Mt. 28:19-20). The book of Revelation describes people of every tribe, tongue, and nation worshiping the Lamb, Jesus Christ. It does not merely describe one people group whether black, white, yellow, or red. "After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; 10 And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb," (Revelation 7:9-10; cf. Revelation 5:9). "And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."

Error #1b: Minimizing the Person of Jesus

The Black Hebrew Israelites, unfortunately, minimize the person of Jesus, and the focus of their religion becomes black identity and cultural revolution. While it is certainly true that black people have been mistreated and taught many false things by mainstream culture, this is not grounds for minimizing the person of Jesus Christ. Who Jesus is should be the central component of any religion that claims to follow the Old and New Testament. Jesus said, "for unless you believe that I am [He], you will die in your sins," (John 8:24). Jesus is saying that unless you believe that He is the I AM of the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14), you will die in your sins. To reject who Jesus claimed to be is to suffer death in your sins. This is the most critical issue of any religion. The Bible was written to testify of who Jesus is. It is not primarily an identity sourcebook for a particular race of people.

Error #2: Denial of the Trinity

The Bible emphatically teaches that there is one God in all existence (Isaiah 43:10; 44:6, 8; John 17:3). However, it also teaches that Jesus is God (John 1:1-3; 5:18; 8:24; 1 Tim. 3:16). Jesus receives worship (Matthew 2:2, 11), is prayed to (1 Corinthians 1:2; Acts 7:55-59), and is called God (John 20:28; Hebrews 1:6-8). In fact, Old Testament Yahweh passages using the divine name of God are applied to Jesus in the New Testament. Jesus exhibits the unique identity of God.

However, the Bible also describes the Holy Spirit as God (Acts 5; 2 Cor. 13:14) and having personal attributes (John 14:26). Since there is only one God, not three gods, each of these three persons have to be the one God. This is the Trinity.

Error #3: Salvation is only in the Hebrew Name of Jesus

The New Testament was written in Greek, while Jesus probably spoke in Aramaic which is a sister language of Hebrew. The New Testament writers originally wrote in Greek. Salvation was by calling upon the name of the Lord (Romans 10:13; cf. Joel 2:32). Paul, in quoting the Old Testament, uses a Greek translation of the Hebrew text in order to get his salvation point across. The issue is not an exact pronunciation of the Hebrew name, but belief in the Person described in the New Testament.

The author states, based on Acts 4:12, that you have to call upon Jesus in Hebrew. However, he fails to note that the passage that he quotes from is in Greek! The original text of Acts 4 was in Greek. Jesus' name in Greek is Iesous, not Yahoshuu. The Bible teaches that one is saved through believing in his heart (Romans 10:9-10), not through the perfect pronunciation of a Hebrew phrase Yahoshua.

Nowhere in the entire New Testament do we see the early apostles teaching that you have to call upon the Hebrew name of Jesus to be saved (Romans 10:13). In fact, many of the early Churches to whom Paul wrote and visited were Greek-speaking peoples who did not know anything about Hebrew.

Error #4: We must keep the Law of Moses

We are not under the Law of Moses today. Jesus came to fulfill the Law. He did this when he died on the cross and his blood rent the temple veil in two. Jesus is the mediator of a New Covenant (Hebrews 7-9). Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a curse for us (Galatians 3:13). The Law has been done away with. There certainly are moral teachings in the Law in which we should abide, such as not to murder, commit adultery, steal, etc. These teachings are found in the New Testament (Matthew 19:18).

The Law says that we should not lie, steal, covet, or commit adultery. Jesus said that if you look at a woman with lust, you have committed adultery with her already in your heart. Since we cannot keep those Laws, we are guilty before God. The Law was never intended to make us perfect before God. It was to show us our sinfulness and show us our need for Christ (Galatians 3:25; Romans 3:20). The issue is a heart issue. As Jeremiah says, God will write a New Covenant on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34).

Error #5: God's only true name is Yah

Scholars today are not exactly certain what the divine name of God actually is. The original Hebrew text did not have vowel pointings. It was not until around the 7th century that the Hebrew Massoretes began to add vowel pointings to aid pronunciation. While Psalm 68:4 calls God's name Yah, God is also called by various other names in the Old Testament including Yahweh, Elohim, El, etc. Psalm 68 does not teach that God's only name is Yah, nor that one has to know this name in order to be saved. If one has to call on God's name precisely as it is described in Scripture, then one must also call on these other few dozen names of God in precise Hebrew fashion. However, if there are no vowel pointings for this Hebrew name, then how do we even know the exact name of God?

Also, many scholars think that the closest representation of the divine name is Yahweh or Yehvah, not just Yah. Should we be in turmoil since we do not know the exact name of God?

Finally, many Jews did not pronounce the name of God since they were afraid of breaking the fourth commandment (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). So as not to take the Lord's name in vain, these Hebrews would say the name Adonai to substitute for Yahweh. They did not want to disrespect this sacred name.

Error #6: Denial of Heaven and Hell

The Bible emphatically teaches that there is a heaven and hell. These are not just metaphors but are descriptions of actual places. The Bible speaks of hell as a lake of fire, the second death, eternal separation, etc. Also, heaven is described as bliss, etc. God will restore the earth and there will be a new heaven and a new earth, but there still is a literal place where the righteous will dwell eternally and a literal hell where the wicked will dwell eternally in torment (Mt. 25:41-46).

Error #7: Native Americans are descendants of the Israelites

DNA evidence suggests that Native Americans are actually descendants from Asiatic peoples in Mongolia, who migrated to the United States via the Bering Land Straight through modern-day Alaska. While there could have been people who came to North America from Africa, the DNA evidence does not suggest that these Native Americans actually have Middle Eastern origins. For the Black Hebrew Israelites to argue that Native Americans in North America are descendants of Israelites, they must provide DNA evidence to support such arguments.

As a result, it is quite doubtful that the Black Hebrew Israelites view of the origins of the peoples in North America is accurate.

Quotes

1. Black Hebrew Israelites claim they are not hate preachers

1. A true Israelite is not a hate preacher or racist. That would be going against the words of the Creator. Israel can't be a hate filled people, our whole duty for being chosen is to take the word of the Most High to all the nations on the earth, so they can get salvation.¹⁰
2. "...A True Hebrew doesn't hate men for the sake of hating or because of skin color. Hebrews teach again the doctrinal lies that exist in those religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). But we don't hate the people we hate the lies. All Lies come from the mouth of the adversary Satan, he is the father of lies."¹¹

2. The Identity of the Hebrew Israelites

1. "The Hebrew Israelites are the modern descendants of the ancient Israelites. The Hebrew Israelites have been scattered to the four corners of the earth. They reside in all lands among all people, they are suffering from the curses that are found in the law books of Leviticus chapter 26 and Deuteronomy chapter 28. Today they are known by the bywords and proverbs of "BLACKS, AFRICAN AMERICANS, AFRO AMERICANS, NEGROES, NIGGERS, ETC. The Hebrew Israelites are the true descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are the priest of the Most High."¹²
2. "...The Most High said the Curses found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 are the Identifying mark. Whatever people are suffering the curses in their entirety are the true Israelites. This site has proven that the so called black man and woman of the western hemisphere who got to this part of the world as captives in the bottom of slave ships. Fit the full scriptural description of Israel, any other people who are claiming Israelite heritage must fit the full description of Israel in the latter days."

3. Jesus

1. "Some of Israel do believe in the Messiah and some don't. Even among the ones who don't there exist a slight separation of what they believe about the messiah, this can also be found among the ones who do believe. There isn't one universal belief about the Messiah among Hebrew Israelites. Well not yet."¹³

4. The Bible

1. There are mistranslations in the King James Version, but it does contain truth: "Although a few mistranslation exist in the KJV, such as the name Jew, Jesus and Jehovah in my humble opinion this translation is still very useful and still contains THE truth."
2. There are other books that belong in the Bible: "These are books that were removed FROM the bible, by so called Roman Catholic authorities. I highly recommend you get these missing books, they are part of scripture, in many cases they fill in the missing blank in some of the 66 "canonized" bible books. For instance In the book of Genesis chapter 6 the sons of Yah are mention who have taken on the daughter of men, this passage is very controversial so many interpetations have been given about Genesis 6. But the book of Enoch says the sons of Yah Were sinful angels who had sex with Human women (the daughters of men). Both the apostles Peter and Jude makes quotes from the book of Enoch, these missing books are just as valid as the 66 books. The book of Jasher is mention twice in the scriptures. The missing books can give you a lot of understanding, I highly advise you find a copy to increase your understanding of Yah's Word."

Background Articles

- Has the Old Testament been corrupted?
- Has the New Testament been corrupted?

Background Sources

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Hebrew_Israelites
- <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/blackjews.html>
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- <http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2001/winter/popularity-and-populism>

- http://www.adl.org/poisoning_web/black_bigots.asp

References

- 1 blackapologetics.com
- 2 I was in New York City near Times Square back in August of 2009 when I first saw the Hebrew Israelites in person. They were the most vulgar, hate-filled, bitter people that I have ever met. They would not listen to people who wanted to dialogue or ask honest questions. I realize that not all Hebrew Israelites act this way. However, that was just my one experience.
- 3 For examples of their hatred and intolerance, see the various YouTube videos: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI1Zdt031r8>. To the Hebrew Israelites credit, they generally do not advocate violence even though they do use profanity and are very aggressive in their evangelistic methods.
- 4 <http://www.hebrewisraelites.org/faq.htm>, accessed 12-28-11.
- 5, <http://www.hebrewisraelites.org/faq.htm>
- 10,
- 11,
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- 6 <http://www.hebrewisraelites.org/>
- 7 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XI1Zdt031r8>
- 8 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cS7QrjXqI1I>
- 9 <http://www.hebrewisraelites.org/Links.htm>

