

The
Hebrew Heritage
of Our
West African
Ancestors



fully documented



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Steven Jacobs - Rudolph Windsor

Rose-Lee, Inc., Publishers

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The Hebrew Heritage of
Our West African Ancestors
By Steven^S_N Jacobs & Rudolph Windsor
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RUDOLPH WINDSOR

RUDOLPH R. WINDSOR was born in Long Branch, New Jersey. After his family settled in Philadelphia, he attended Community College, studying psychology and political science. He also attended Gratz College where he majored in Hebraic studies, and was graduated in 1967. He is president of the Afro-Asian Israelite Cultural Center in Philadelphia, and a member of Adeth Emeth Israel, a black Israelite congregation there. He also is the author of FROM BABYLON TO TIMBUKTU: A History of the Ancient Black Races Including the Black Hebrews, published by Exposition Press, Inc., New York.

STEVEN S. JACOBS was born and raised in Philadelphia where he attended the University of Pennsylvania. He is president of Rose-Lee, Inc., the publisher, and a student of African and Middle East history. He says, "Unlike Mr. Windsor's earlier book, this new book puts its emphasis on the evidence of the Hebrew civilization in Black Africa and traces the movements of peoples not discussed before. I hope this book will encourage the reader to investigate further and to read the earlier book by Mr. Windsor."

Introduction: Read This First.....

Are black Americans the descendants of West African Hebrews? This question is answered in the affirmative, with a resounding yes, by Professor Joseph J. Williams after more than eleven years of intensive research into the subject.

In his book entitled Hebrewisms of West Africa, this eminent cultural anthropologist documents the origins and extent of the Hebrew religion and culture in that part of West Africa which is the ancestral home of most black Americans. His book has 443 pages. It is documented with more than 1,400 footnotes. In reality, it is a compendium of very nearly every major treatise on the subject. Professor Williams cites over 900 different scholars and eye-witnesses in this encyclopedic effort.

Unfortunately, the original book by Joseph Williams is not available to most readers. And even if it were, it is far too detailed and expensive for most tastes. For these reasons, we have obtained the necessary consent to reproduce the most salient portions under the title The Hebrew Heritage of Our West African Ancestors, together with the rights to include our own editorial comments and supplementary information. The purpose is to bring to every reader, scholar and layman alike, an insight into and perspective of a civilization and heritage which he or she never may have realized exists.

For those unacquainted with Professor Williams, his scholarly credentials are beyond dispute. Besides devoting eleven years of research to this one subject, he held doctoral degrees in history and cultural anthropology. He was a Fellow in the British Royal Geographical Society and the American Geographical Society. He was a member of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures. He was a member of the Catholic Anthropological Conference. And he was the author of several books on black civilization and culture in Africa and the West Indies.

The purpose of The Hebrew Heritage of Our West African Ancestors goes beyond merely providing the reader with new insights. In this age when the black man is striving to learn more about himself and his origins, this book is intended to provide a sure basis for renewed pride and confidence in his Israelite heritage. To black Jews -- and white Jews alike -- it should provide further evidence of the universality of their faith. And to everyone, regardless of his color or religion, this book should reveal that black culture, far from being lost in the backwaters of the African jungle, was and continues to be very much in the mainstream of civilization as we know it today.

This book comes, as we said, at a time when black people the world over are seeking to rediscover themselves. Dissatisfied simply to learn about white European history and heroes, black people in their intellectual and cultural reawakening want -- in fact need to know who they were so they can decide who they are. The whole person is, after all, a product of past and present. No one can escape his heritage entirely. Nor can anyone escape the environment in which he was born and lives.

It is important to recognize at the outset that no religion or culture is created or exists in a vacuum. On the contrary, we all are products of societies influenced by events from within and without. In truth, nothing is 100% pure whether we talk about race or religion, or social or political philosophy, or any other aspect of life.

What, for instance, constitutes pure or distinctively Jewish traditions to the person of European ancestry is far different from that of Jews elsewhere. The so-called typical European Jewish foods such as bagels and matzo ball soup are not Hebrew but Slavic in origin. The lingua franca of East and Central European Jewry, called Yiddish, really is Eleventh Century High German with an admixture of Slavic and Hebrew words. The very word "synagogue," commonly used to signify a Jewish house of worship, actually is of Greek origin. Even the word "Jew" was made popular long after the Bible was completed. The words "Israelite" and "Hebrew" are of much older vintage.

In the same way, the Jewish civilization of Black Africa contains much that is not exclusively Hebrew in origin. This is due to both historical and geographical factors. The climatic and geographical differences alone could themselves account for vast differences in Judaism as practiced and lived in different countries and continents.

What then can be offered as evidence of a common Hebraic background among peoples in and from black West Africa and the Middle East? Professor Williams masterfully provides us with the answers. His abundantly documented research proves once and for all times that Judaism, the religion and culture of the Hebrews, is deeply rooted in the native soil of Black Africa, just as it is more commonly recognized to exist in Europe and America.

Professor Williams' research deals primarily with the African continent and to a lesser extent with the West Indies. For this reason, we have added a section which brings into sharper focus the existence of a Black Hebrew culture in the Middle East itself. There are numerous sources, including the Bible, which tell us that from the time of Abraham, onward, black civilization and Hebrew civilization were synonymous. Even Professor Williams, who makes no special attempt to prove this one way or the other, alludes to this when he quotes Sir Harry H. Johnston that "negroid people with kinky hair" inhabited the Babylonian homeland of Abraham. Williams continues that this conclusion makes easier "our present endeavor to show an infiltration of the same Hebrew stock in the evolving of certain tribes in Africa."

To make our book as meaningful as possible, the schema will be for us to summarize certain portions of Williams' book and to quote exactly from other sections. Because much of his text consists of quotations from other scholars, we will refer directly to them wherever we utilize their remarks. In this way we can provide the reader with a condensed yet faithful reproduction of the thoughts and research of Professor Williams. To fully up-date our book, we occasionally will make grammatical changes and add editorial notes and comments of our own to make reading as smooth and pleasant as possible.

Now we request our reader to settle back in a comfortable chair, with a good reading light, and enjoy the true story of The Hebrew Heritage of Our West African Ancestors....

The Broader Scene

Before we reach the distant shores of Black Africa, we want to remind our reader that the pages which follow actually represent the views of more than 900 scholars and eye-witnesses. Professor Joseph Williams, to the extent that our book utilizes his, is only the editor in a sense. As a result of his more than eleven years of intensive research into the subject, he was able to piece together from a mosaic of sources enough evidence to prove once and for all times that the original Black Hebrew civilization spread throughout the length and breadth of Africa.

There is a famous old saying, a rose is a rose by any other name. This means that a rose still is a rose no matter what name it is given. We who live in America are accustomed to thinking in terms of the European cultural standards which prevail. Even the black man thinks of himself by his European names -- Negro, which is Spanish, or colored or black which are English words. Rarely if ever does he think of himself as Fanti or Ashanti or Fulani or Guinean.

In this same sense, an Israelite is an Israelite by any other name. Because most of us are accustomed to hearing the word Jew and associating this word with white faces, it is surprising to many that black people also claim a Hebrew heritage. This common misimpression, however, is largely due to the kind of cultural conditioning with which our European-oriented society is imbued.

It should be remembered when reading the pages that follow that the black man, until recently, was denied the means to assert his own individuality. Even where he gained the legal rights, he usually lacked the tools to effectively be his own master. These tools include a homogeneous family and community life, an unbroken tradition of education, the ability to function independently both politically and economically, and the psychological self-assurance that comes with being a first-class citizen.

Moreover it should be kept in mind that the white man, as is logical, has written and interpreted history largely from his own point of view. Take this illustration as a simple example. Not long ago, a prominent American newspaper featured a story about Kinshasa, the capital city of the Republic of Congo (formerly the Belgian Congo). The article mentioned the "native quarter" of the city, referring to that section where its black citizens live. This description is grossly misleading if one realizes that at least 85% of Kinshasa is black and 99% of the Congo nation is too! To speak of a native quarter is to imply the existence of a black minority there. Nothing is farther from the truth!

Contemporary recorded Israelite history is likewise almost exclusively of white Jewish and white Gentile origin. The result has been not so much errors of commission as errors of omission. In other words, the major short-comings of European-oriented histories of Africa and the Middle East are largely what is omitted. The stress is put on what ties together and supports white European culture with that of the Middle East. They usually omit any mention of the relationships between black African and Middle East civilizations.

The bias in our knowledge of history is reflected by the fact that very few if any standard textbooks deal extensively with the relationships between early Christianity and the pagan Graeco-Roman religions, for instance. Very few if any standard textbooks discuss the fact that most white Jews are descendants of Greeks, Romans, Armenians and others who adopted Judaism as their religion during the period of its greatest expansion in the Mediterranean area. Very few if any textbooks deal with the fact that black Dravidians inhabited the region contiguous with the Middle East until the white Aryans pushed them into the southern half of the Indian peninsula.

Professor Williams book does not attempt to deal at length with every omission by white historians. He does, however, provide us with many scholarly insights so that we, the readers, can enjoy a better balanced picture of history, especially African history. We therefore are indebted to Professor Williams and the many others whose scholarship made our book possible. Black Americans now are in a position as never before to rediscover -- and reclaim -- a heritage which has profoundly influenced world history.

To assist the reader to better understand the roots of Black America, our book attempts where possible to follow the route taken by Professor Williams. We even use his chapter headings so that our reader can picture the basic subject matter as he sees it. To begin, our next chapter is entitled "The Ashanti of West Africa." This is followed by chapters on Ashanti Hebrewisms, the Supreme Being of the Ashanti, other Hebrewisms of Black Africa, and related topics.

The Ashanti of West Africa

Professor Williams begins his book by recalling his discoveries and observations while living for five years on the West Indian island of Jamaica. Intrigued by certain similarities with ancient Hebrew customs, this famous Jesuit scholar then began an eleven year search to determine if there really were affinities between Middle East customs and those found in Africa and the West Indies.

The following are the words of Dr. Williams which summarize his reasons for pursuing the subject. He says that "to understand properly the spirit and aspirations of the Jamaican peasant, a close study of the (African) Ashanti themselves became necessary. And this study, in turn, led to some rather startling results and conclusions.

"In the first place," he continues, "many Hebrewisms were discovered in Ashanti tribal customs. Then several Ashanti words were found to have a striking resemblance to those of equivalent Hebrew meaning. Finally, the Supreme Being of the Ashanti gave strong evidence of being the Yahweh (God) of the Old Testament.

"The question," he says, "naturally arose, how to explain these parallels of cultural traits? Should they be ascribed to mere coincidence or independent development? Or have we here a remarkable instance of diffusion across the entire breadth of Africa? Is it possible to establish even a partial historical contact between the Ashanti of today and the Hebrews of fully two thousand years ago, or more?"

The answers to these questions Professor Williams deduces can be found "by trying to trace the story of the dispersion of the Jews" from the Middle East and by studying the "tribal beliefs and practices and the records of early European travelers, particularly those who had written of the manners and customs of the African black man."

What is the geographical and historical significance of the Ashanti of West Africa about whom Dr. Williams concentrates the first part of his study? The answer is that the Ashanti represent a large grouping of peoples, not an isolated tribe, about whom a fair amount of information is known. Of equal importance, the Ashanti and related groups of people also inhabit an area roughly the same as that from which the slave ancestors of most Black Americans came.

Today this region is divided into several newly independent nations. They include the republics of Senegal, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Dahomey, Nigeria and Cameroon. The boundaries of these nations were arbitrarily established prior to their independence through conquest and the international political intrigues of the earlier European colonial rulers. For these reasons, every tribal grouping of any consequence can be found to overlap national borders as they exist today.

The result is that the Ashanti are found in a wide area of West Africa. In fact they are so numerous that practically every other tribe is in some way interrelated. According to Ernest Chantre, a director of the Anthropological Society of Lyons (France), "the Ashanti do not constitute a pure ethnic group but an aggregate of negro types."

The problem confronting Professor Williams was whether the lineage of these Ashanti can be traced or connected to other civilizations. Andre Arcin is quoted by Williams to conclude that "From Ethiopia, Middle Egypt and Central Sudan descended the Ashanti and the tribes known as Bantu."

Professor Roland B. Dixon, an anthropologist from Harvard University in his study of the physical characteristics of the Ashanti, notes a similarity "to the Chad group of people in the Sudan." The Sudanese Republic is in the north-eastern section of Africa, near Egypt and Ethiopia. The black immigration, he adds, "was in part a westerly drift from the Chad-Nile area, and in part a direct souward movement from the western Sudan and the Sahara borders forced by the expansion in the Sahara region of the Caucasian peoples who have poured into northern Africa since very early times."

Dr. Hermann Bauman of the State Museum of Anthropology in Berlin, West Germany, concludes that the Ashanti are to be classified with "the strongly Sudanese Yoruba and Nupe." The historian, Walter Claridge, in a book about the history of Ghana and the Ashanti concludes that "the Fantis, Ashantis, Wassawa, and in fact all the Twi-speaking or Akan peoples were originally one tribe."

In summary we find the following general observations made by Professor Williams and other leading scholars about the African origins of the Ashanti:

1. The Ashanti are an ethnic mixture of the peoples of West Africa, the ancestral home of most Black Americans.
2. The Ashanti are closely related to the Bantu, Yoruba, Fanti, Sudanese and other peoples whose combined population stretches from the west to the east coasts of Africa mainly below the Sahara.

3. The Ashanti tribes appear to have migrated and later pushed westward and southward by alien invaders of European origin. They appear to have emanated from the Chad-Nile region of north-eastern Africa.

But the question still remains whether the earlier Ashanti and related peoples have any connection with the Hebrews of the Middle East. The answer which Professor Williams reaches is that the similarities, which are too great to ignore, can be accounted for only by the fact "that somewhere in the remote past there was an infiltration of the ancient Hebrews in the parent stock from which the present Ashanti evolved."⁹ In fact it was the "continuous influx of Hebrew settlers, trekking up the Nile" which he says "eventually spread itself clear across Africa to the Niger and thence over pretty much the whole of West Africa."¹⁰

There is no doubt in the mind of Professor Williams that the Ashanti are infused with the blood and culture of earlier Hebrews who migrated from the Middle East. Nor is there any doubt that these same Ashantis are related today to virtually every tribal grouping in Black West Africa. The evidence according to Professor Williams is cumulative and revealed by the many striking parallels between the civilization of black West Africa and the Hebrew Middle East. And it is reinforced, as we shall see, by similar resemblances throughout the rest of Black Africa as well.

Ashanti Hebrewisms

This chapter is devoted to a detailed analysis of the similarities between Ashanti and Hebrew customs, usages and practices. The similarities included in this chapter can be put into two basic categories:

1. Language usage;
2. Customs and religious practices.

The study reveals many striking similarities. It also uncovers areas which appear disparate at first glance, but which are in fact very much alike on closer examination. Let us now read what Professor Williams and others have to say.

Language usage

Dr. Williams cites as an example of language similarities the Ashanti word "obayifo" which means a female witch. According to J.G. Christaller in his dictionary of the Ashanti language, this word is derived from "obayen" which in turn is a compound of "ob" and "ayen," together meaning witch-wizard. This word, whose West Indian equivalent is "obeah," can be traced says linguistics expert John Bathurst Deane "to the Canaanite superstition of Ob."

M. Oldfield Howey, an expert on African culture, notes more pointedly that "the witch of Endor is spoken of as an ob, and was applied to by King Saul for an oracle. Today among blacks the same is found. The ob-man or ob-woman, is habitually consulted in any case of doubt and difficulty, just as was the ob-woman of Endor by King Saul."

Williams observes that "the very term used by the native, to 'make ob,' which has come to Jamaica from the old Ashanti slaves, is idiomatically the same as the Scriptural *ASA OB* found in II Kings 21:6, one of the crimes charged against King Manasseh, and which literally means 'he made ob.'"

"The very word Ashanti has itself a strong Hebraic flavor," says Williams. "The terminal syllable 'ti' in the names of West African tribes usually has the general meaning of 'the race of' or 'the men of' or 'the children of,'" comments Louis Desplagnes in his book about the people of the central plateau of Nigeria. Williams reaches the inevitable conclusion that "this would make Ashanti 'the people of Ashan.' There was in fact a town of the name Ashan in the domain of Judah."

Dr. Gerson B. Levi talks about Ashan in his contribution of the same name found in the Jewish Encyclopedia. He says "Ashan: Town in the domain of Judah (Joshua 15:42), but which was in the actual possession of Simeon (Joshua 19:7; I Chronicles 4:32)." ⁸

"The primary meaning of the Hebrew word 'Ashan' is smoke," says Williams, "and it is used primarily to describe a burning city, and secondly the figurative destruction of Israel." ⁹ He cites the Hebrew and English Lexicon of Brown, Driver and Briggs as his source. "The latter meaning," he continues, "would be significant and certainly applicable to fugitives from Jerusalem." ¹⁰

Even the word "Amen" appears in both the Ashanti and Hebrew languages. Professor Rattray, an expert in the Ashanti language, cites an Ashanti hymn of thanks to the Supreme Being in which this word is used. According to this renowned scholar, the use of the word by the Ashanti precedes the arrival of Christian missionaries to West Africa. ¹¹

The study of general Ashanti and Hebrew grammars also reveal other similarities which cannot be dismissed lightly. J.G. Christaller explains, for example, that the relative participle in the Ashanti language "serves to make up for the lack of relative pronouns, as in the Hebrew." ¹² In addition, the negative in Ashanti usually is formed by the prefix N meaning not. ¹³ The noun-clause in Hebrew is made negative by the adverb EN which literally means "it is not." ¹⁴

Williams remarks that "a careful study of Professor Rattray's Ashanti Proverbs discloses many indications of seeming Hebrew affinity or rather influence." ¹⁵ Moreover he observes "the parallelism so distinctive of Hebrew poetry also is found in the Ashanti."

Customs and religious practices

We can begin to see just how closely the Ashanti and Hebrew are fused by examining their common cultural and religious characteristics. This chapter deals with some of the peripheral or secondary cultural and religious similarities. Some of them are as follows:

1. Inter-tribal marriage laws;
2. Marriage rites;
3. Female child-birth and menstruation.

Inter-tribal marriage laws. According to Professor Williams, the Mosaic laws concerning marriages within the tribes to preserve the inheritance of daughters within the family of their fathers (Numbers 36:5-12) are very similar to Ashanti practices. ¹⁷ And the cross-cousin marriages of the Ashanti ¹⁸ are "strictly similar to that of the Hebrew daughters of Salphaad who...wed 'the sons of the brothers of their fathers (Numbers 36:11).'" ¹⁹

Marriage rites. The Ashanti marriage customs, says Rattray, require that the prospective bride and groom first satisfy themselves that their marriage will not violate the tribal laws concerning the marriage of blood relatives. Then, after obtaining the consent of the parents of the bride, the groom offers a dowry and a wine offering. After the wine is passed to those present at the ceremony, what remains is poured on the ground. These are the only requirements. No priest is needed.²⁰

Professor Williams observes that "in the ancient Hebrew marriage, the ceremony was performed in a private house without the necessary presence of a priest or rabbi. An elder invoked the benediction and gave a cup of wine to the bride and groom who pledged fidelity to each other. The bridegroom then dashed the cup to the ground. The marriage contract was then read and attested by the drinking of a cup of wine by each person present "almost exactly as do the Ashanti."²¹

Female child-birth and menstruation. One of the striking similarities between Ashanti and Hebrew customs is the realm of child birth. For example, the Ashanti mother is considered "unclean" for eight days after the birth of her child. On the eighth day the child is given a name and on the fortieth day a related ceremony is observed.²² "In all this we are certainly reminded of Hebrew customs," says Williams. Even the restrictions and taboos of the Ashanti woman during her menstrual period including her seclusion "read like a page borrowed from the Book of Leviticus," he says referring no doubt to the Twelfth Chapter.²³

In summary, we can safely say that the Ashanti language contains much that very closely resembles Hebrew including the word Ashanti itself. Moreover we find certain important customs in common. Add to these the certainty that the Ashanti people generally migrated from the direction of the Middle East. Together we can envision a close link between the two peoples if not a common ancestry. Just how close we will more fully realize from reading the next chapter.

The Supreme Being of the Ashanti

Most people outside Black Africa think of the indigenous African religions as polytheistic and idolatrous. If asked to find similarities between native black African and Hebrew concepts of God, for instance, the answer almost always heard is that there are none. After all, they reason, Africans believe in many gods. The Jews only believe in one.

Here is a perfect example of a misconception which has resulted from long-standing historical bias and a considerable lack of knowledge. A closer examination of black African religious beliefs reveals the nature and extent of this error.

First it is important to recognize the nature of Hebrew religious beliefs and practices, particularly during the Biblical era. Professor George Foot Moore, a Harvard University historian, states that "the Biblical forefathers had fallen away from the true religion, not only by worshipping other gods (but) by worshipping their own God in a heathen way."¹ Dr. A.W.F. Blunt, a well-known archeologist, notes that "to a late date, as excavations prove, the Israelites continued to use models of cows and plaques of Astarte as amulets."²

Another historian, R.L. Ottley, confirms this view. He says "the Hebrews did not openly abandon their allegiance to Jehovah, but they co-ordinated and sometimes even identified their national Deity with one or other of the Canaanite gods. Thus the simple and pure worship of Jehovah was gradually corrupted by the admixtures of usages and symbols borrowed from the nature worship of the Canaanites."³

Illustrations of this situation are frequent in the Bible. For example, Chapter 23 of II Kings lists several examples, including the fact that King Solomon built altars to Ashtoreth, the pagan goddess of fertility. None-the-less, F. Pret observes that "the idolatry of the Hebrews was less an apostacy than the adoption of strange practices and ceremonies."⁴

Thus we can see, almost at a glance, a certain parallel between the historical condition of Biblical Israel and that commonly attributed to black African religious practices. The awareness should remove the mental obstacles in our investigation of the similarities between these two traditions notwithstanding the evident corruption of them both at one time or another.

We might look to start at the conclusions of William Bosman who wrote several books on his first-hand experiences with the peoples of the Gold Coast, now Ghana, of West Africa. He notes in no uncertain words that these people "ascribe to God the attributes of Omnipresence, Omniscience, and Invisibility, besides which they believe He governs all things by Providence. By reason God is invisible they say it would be absurd to make any human representation of Him" as do Christians. For this reason, he says the idols before which they worship only represent "subordinate deities."⁵

At this juncture it might be well to consider whether the African concept of the Almighty God stems from Christian or Islamic influences. Professor R. Sutherland Rattray, who Williams calls a captain and "a master of the Ashanti language and an official interpreter in several other dialects," asserts: "I am convinced that the Ashanti conception of a Supreme Being has nothing whatever to do with missionary influence or Mohammedans."⁶ He adds: "In a sense it is true that this great Supreme Being, the concept of which is inately Ashanti, is the Jehovah of the Israelites."⁷

The views which we have stated thusfar largely are generalizations. In this very important area of theology, the question naturally arises whether there are specific proofs that the Almighty God of the Ashanti and that of the Hebrews are synonymous. We think the following evidence should satisfy all but the most incredulous that they are one and the same!

First let us compare the Ashanti and Hebrew names for God. The full name of the Ashanti Supreme Being is ONYAME. The O ordinarily is not pronounced so the spelling Nyame is more exact phonetically. The A is a short vowel as in bat. The E also is a short vowel as in met. The N is a prefix to convey the idea of immensity. This leaves the root word YAME.⁸ Rattray and Christaller both assert that the letter M is interchangeable with W in the Ashanti language.⁹ In other words the Ashanti name for God can be pronounced Yame or Yawe, with short vowels.

We find a similar situation in Biblical Hebrew. Dr. Albert T. Clay, an archeological linguistics expert at Yale University, notes that "in the Murushu archives found at Nippur, belonging to the reigns of Artaxerxes and Darius, the divine element in Hebrew names is written Ja-a-ma for Yawa." He also mentions a clay tablet found at Ta'anach which "contains the divine name of Israel's God written Jami."¹⁰ He concludes unhesitatingly that "some Semitic groups used M and others W to represent the same sound."¹¹ Thus we learn that the word for the Almighty God can be spelled and/or pronounced as Yawe or Yame in both Hebrew and Ashanti.

But the similarity does not end with the precise word for the Almighty God. The word for Creator in Ashanti is Bore-bore.¹² The exact equivalent in sound and meaning is Bore¹³ which is the participle form for the Hebrew word Bara¹⁴ that means "to create." The word "bore" is used for example in Isaiah 42:5.

In the Ashanti language, God also is called Nyankapon Kwame which means "God alone, great One, to whom Saturday is dedicated." This dedication to the Jewish Sabbath is verified in a letter written in 1922 by the Ashanti Queen, Amma Sewa Akota, to the wife of the British Governor to the Gold Coast. The letter reads in part that "the great God Nyankapon...whose day of worship is a Saturday."¹⁵ Once again we have another similarity to a very important Hebrew concept: the observance of Saturday as the Sabbath in honor of the Almighty God (Genesis 2:1-3).

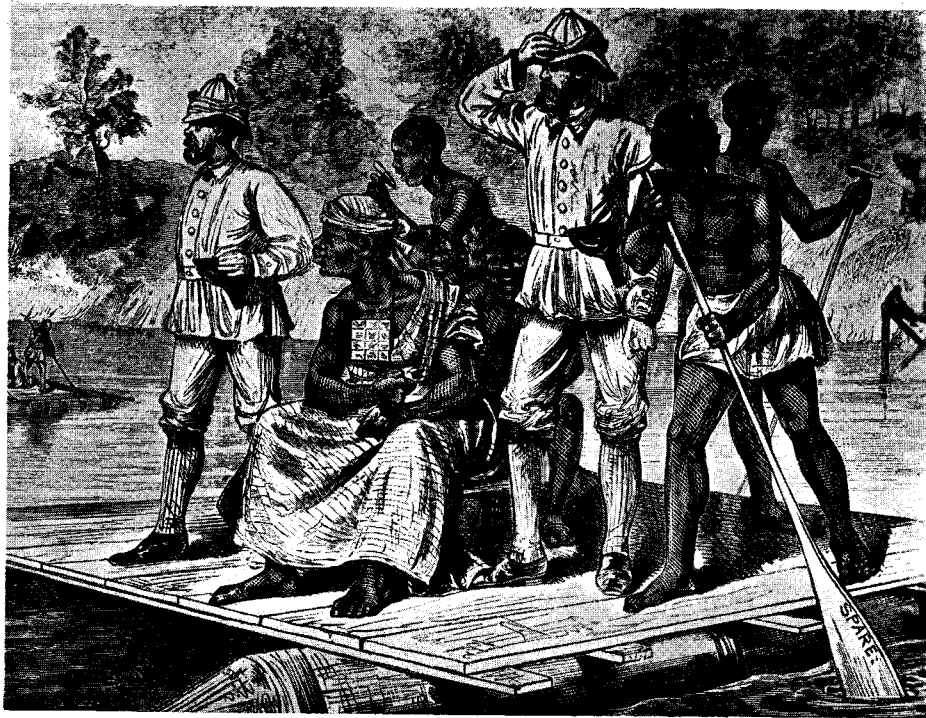
Certain Christian theologians have sought to liken the visualization of the Ashanti Supreme Being with the popular Christian notion that God is represented in human form. They cite the fact that the prefix N in Nyame (Nyawe) and "im" in Elohim, a Hebrew word for God, both use a plural or collective form.

This Christian view, however, is not supported by the facts. As we learned earlier from Professor Bosman, the Black Africans "say it would be absurd to make any human representation of the Almighty God."¹⁶ Moreover the plural use of the word for God was the grammatical form used in Biblical Hebrew to address any individual of royal or kingly rank. Dr. David Cooper, a fundamentalist-oriented Christian theologian, "admits frankly that in the Semitic world such usage ("of the plural noun for excellency, majesty") was common when subjects addressed their king or at times spoke concerning him."¹⁷ The Hebrews of course could be expected to address God, who was their King of kings, in a similar manner.

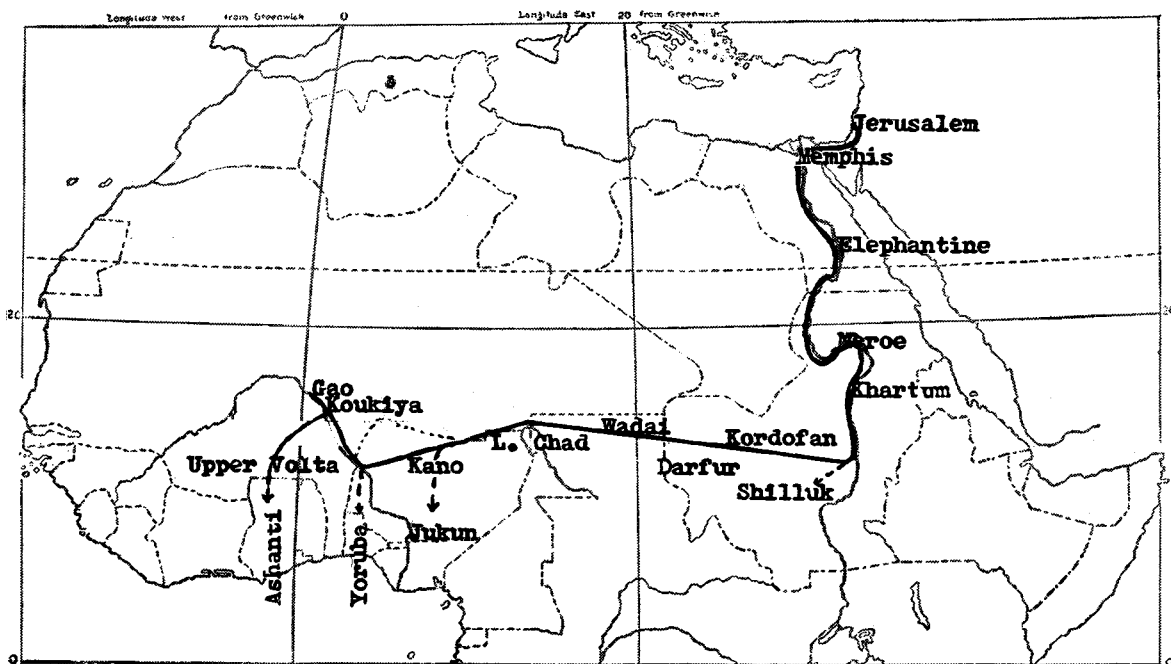
In summary we can see that the Hebrew God and Creator is at the very heart of black African, and particularly Ashanti religious belief. This belief, moreover, relates to the total black African culture because religion is and was traditionally an underlying, integral part of the fabric of its society.

In ancient Israel, the belief in Almighty God was upheld as all-important. In many ways the idea of the Priesthood came second. It was the latter who maintained the Temple, interpreted the laws, and in general were responsible for giving religious direction to the early Jewish nation. Among the Ashanti they also play equally important roles.

To be sure, the existence of a priesthood is a rather universal phenomenon because organized religion must have some kind of leadership. However one important outward symbol existed among the Ashanti priesthood which links it closely to ancient Israel. That symbol is the Breastplate worn by the high priests who usually were representatives of the reigning Ashanti king or queen.



ASHANTI AMBASSADORS CROSSING THE PRAH
(From a drawing by Sir Henry Morton Stanley)



FROM NILE TO NIGER

The accompanying illustration is a reproduction of the actual drawing by Sir Henry Morton Stanley that appeared in the Illustrated London News in the article entitled "From Cape Coast to Coomassie." It was an 1874 edition. The signature of the artist is missing because that part of the illustration is omitted from our copy. However it is recorded by his wife that he made the original drawing as a newspaper correspondent for the New York Herald during his coverage of the Ashanti War of that period.¹⁸

The illustration is titled "Ashantee Ambassadors Crossing the Prah" river and shows Ashanti and British representatives of their respective governments. The illustration also appeared later in a book by Sir Stanley entitled Coomassie and Magdala.¹⁹

What is significant about the breastplate shown in the illustration worn by the Ashanti representative? "At first glance," says Professor Williams, "this would appear to be unquestionably a vestige of the High Priest of the Hebrews. But it is well to remember that Professor Clay observes that the breastplate was not peculiar to the Hebrews. It was to be found as well in Egypt and probably elsewhere. However the divisions of the breastplate into twelve parts is certainly distinctive" as a Hebrew symbol.²⁰

According to Dr. T. Edward Bowditch, perhaps the first contemporary European to come into close contact with the Ashanti, says "One curious evidence may be added to the former identification of the Ashanti nations: It is the tradition that the whole of these people were originally comprehended in twelve tribes or families in which they classify themselves still."²¹ This was in the early 1800's. In addition, Dr. Friedrich Ratzel in his History of Mankind asserts that the Ashanti nation is composed of "twelve stocks...the members of which are distributed randomly throughout the tribes."²²

Professor A.B. Ellis in a book written almost one half century later, in 1881, relates that the Ashanti representatives "pointed to the gold plates on their breasts as being their insignia of office" when asked by the British official of the Gold Coast for evidence of their authority.²³

Besides the breastplate, the illustration shows another highly revealing symbol which links the Ashanti directly to the Hebrews. Williams notes that "the head-dress of the herald (representative) with its gold disc in front satisfies the description of the Hebrew miznefet."²⁴ The miznefet is described in the Jewish Encyclopedia as "a tiara, or perhaps a peculiarly wound turban, with a peak the front of which bore a gold plate with the inscription 'Holy unto Yhwh.'"²⁵

Does this description of the Hebrew miznefet fit the head-dress in the illustration by Sir Stanley? The answer clearly is yes. Moreover it is verified by Professor Rattray who says "The (Ashanti) head-dress of a herald is a cap made from the skin of a Colobus monkey with a gold disc in front."²⁶ These two prominent articles of clothing, the twelve-part breastplate and the gold-disc tiara head-dress, are found in only one other civilization as part of the priestly outfit. That is the Hebrew civilization of Biblical days.

The striking similarities do not end here, however. We might pause to consider some other similarities involving the herald or representative of the Ashanti king or queen about whom we just discussed. Although the relationship between the Ashanti and Hebrew words for herald seem more vague than what we discussed heretofore, they are worth noting.

In the Bible (Exodus 3:2 ff), the saga of the burning bush on Mount Sinai "heralds" the beginning of the all-important Mosaic Revelation. The Hebrew word for bush is SeNE.²⁷ By the same token, Rattray tells us "the Ashanti have a myth which states that the Creator made a herald (osene), a drummer (okyerema), and an executioner (obrafo), and that the precedence of these officials in the Ashanti court is in that order."²⁸ Thus the Ashanti word OSENE, whose root is SENE, is virtually identical with the Hebrew word SeNE. Both refer to a herald or heralding of an important revelation or event.

To support this view, we find likenesses between the other two Ashanti words, OKYEREMA and OBRAFO, and the scene of the Mosaic Revelation on Mount Sinai. The Ashanti word Okyerema, whose root is KYEREMA sounds much like the Hebrew word Khoreb, the western height of Mount Sinai. After dropping the prefix O and the suffix FO from Obrafo, we have BRA which resembles the Hebrew word Brith which means covenant. "The Ashanti myth might thus record progressive stages in the manifestation of Yahweh to the Hebrews: the burning bush, Sinai, and the Mosaic Covenant," says Williams.²⁹

We find still other similarities between the Ashanti and ancient Hebrew cultures, including observances held in early autumn,³⁰ the legal authority of the Ashanti TORO or law-giver, in many ways similar to the law-giving Torah of the Hebrews,³¹ and others. While these illustrations may appear more vague than some of the others, they none-the-less lend additional credence to the conclusion that the Ashanti and Hebrew cultures have common roots.

In summary, we find many striking similarities between the religions and cultures of the Ashanti and the pre-Exilic Hebrews. These similarities are too many and too close to be coincidental. We find the concept and words for the Almighty God are identical. We find the words for Creator are identical. We find the same Sabbath reverence. We find the same historical view of the twelve tribes. We find the same twelve-tribe gold breastplate and head-dress of the priests. We find similar meanings for the word herald which plays an important part in both cultures. We find many other concepts using similar-sounding words. We find many similarities in marriage and child birth customs, all of which play important roles in both societies. And we find the very name Ashanti derives from ancient Israel.

It is important, however, to recognize that the similarities do not end with the Ashanti. They also are found among the other peoples of Black West Africa -- and from Central and Eastern Africa too. For insights into the other peoples of Black Africa, the following chapter digests what Williams and other scholars have to say.

Other Hebrewisms in Black Africa

In this chapter, Dr. Williams introduces the peoples of West Africa who are the neighbors of the Ashanti. In addition, there is a discussion of the peoples who inhabit what commonly is known as Central and East Africa. We have broken the discussion into geographical parts roughly parallel to the countries of modern Africa. However we want to make it clear once again that tribal groupings never fit neatly into one nation or another. The boundaries of the present-day nations are largely of European colonial origin, conceived for reasons often having little to do with tribal affiliation of the population.

To introduce his chapter, Professor Williams says that the information which follows, together with that already discussed, confirms his conviction that there "is a strong infiltration of Hebrew stock" among the peoples of black West Africa.¹

In addition, he re-emphasizes the "polytheistic" tendencies among Jews during different periods in their history by quoting Dr. Nahum Slouschz, a well-known white Jewish historian. He says in his discussion of religious practices in Moslem-dominated North Africa that the Jews of Morocco "often have a polytheistic character which approaches fetichism. There still are some who worship grottoes, and rocks and stones under the guise of saints."²

The purpose of Williams re-emphasizing this polytheistic tendency among North African Jews is to remind the reader that such reversions or aberrations to more primitive religious forms do not disqualify them as Jews or Israelites, whichever term you choose to use. The proof that his conclusion is valid is that most of the Moroccan and other North African Jews have emigrated to the State of Israel where they are full-fledged citizens.

With this introduction, we can better resume our investigation into the cultural affinities between black African and Hebrew civilizations:

Guinea

The observations of J. Leighton Wilson are especially worthy of our attention for any investigation in this region. The reason is because he was a missionary in the Guinean area for 18 years. He afterwards became a director of the American Presbyterian Board of Foreign Missions indicating the high esteem with which he was held by his colleagues. His book Western Africa: Its History, Condition and Prospects was published in 1856. In the preface of his book, Reverend Wilson states that "the great body of the book is the result of my own observations and knowledge."³

He observes in his book that "there are many obvious traces of Judaism, both in Northern and Southern Guinea." He also says that "in northern Guinea paganism and Judaism are united."⁴ He then explains that in the Northern region, the practice of Judaism is "prominently developed, some of the leading features of which are circumcision, the division of tribes into separate families, and very frequently into the number twelve, blood sacrifices with the sprinkling of blood upon the altars and door-posts" and other usages which he classifies of Jewish origin."⁵

Dr. William Bosman in his book about his travels in Guinea observes that the women in this region must accept an oath-drink to acquit themselves of any accusation of adultery. The law is that sickness or death which follows the taking of this drink is evidence of guilt. Bosman claims that "this drink seems very like the bitter water administered to the women of the Old Testament by way of acquitting them of the charge of adultery."⁶

Bosman says elsewhere in his book: "The Negroes still retain several laws and customs which savour of Judaism, as their marrying of their brother's wife and several more. They seem the same in effect, as well as the names, of which here (in Guinea) are several which occur in the Old Testament."⁷

Mungo Park in his book entitled Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa, written in 1810, observes the legal whippings among the Teesee people in the Kassob region. He says, "the number of stripes was precisely the same as are required by Mosaic Law, forty, save one." He notes further that these people were neither Christian nor Moslem at that time."⁸

In the same book, Park notes that "on the first appearance of the new moon, the natives say a short prayer...to the Supreme Being. This prayer is pronounced in a whisper, the party holding up his hands before his face. This ceremony seems to be nearly the same which prevailed among the Hebrews in the days of Job."⁹

It is significant to note the words of Rabbi Kaufman Kohler in a Jewish Encyclopedia article on the "New Moon." He maintains "the period of the New Moon in pre-exilic times...was superior even to the Sabbath day which formed but a part of it, but lost its importance during the Exile (beginning about 586 B.C.)" He also says in this article that "in the Temple, the New Moon was celebrated by special sacrifices and by the blowing of the trumpet."¹⁰

Dahomey

To study the Dahomian region of West Africa, we turn first to a series of articles by Professor Williams which appeared during 1936 and 1937 in the Anthropological Series of the Boston College Graduate School. These articles contain numerous scholarly and eye-witness references which do not appear in his book.

One such scholar is Professor Melville Herskovitz of Northwestern University who Williams describes as "one of the most distinguished American anthropologists." ¹¹ Dr. Herskovitz, writing about the Ewe (pronounced a'vā) of Dahomey and Togo notes that "in the life of the Dahomian, Mawu is but another Vodou or Yehwe, the two (sets of) terms being synonymous." ¹² He also says elsewhere that "Mawu is but another Vodou or Yehwe, a generic term for Great God." ¹³

Although his phonetic spelling differs somewhat, J.A. Sketcherly writing about Dahomey confirms that "their Supreme Being is called Mau or Mahu-no, and is vested with unlimited authority over every being, both spiritual and carnal." ¹⁴

Bishop Auguste Herman in a series of articles about the Ewe people among whom he lived provides us with a most revealing insight into their beliefs -- and the similarities to those of the ancient Hebrews:

He says, "This cult of Mahou presents certain particulars which resemble survivals of primitive religion of a Hebrew tradition. It teaches its followers a high idea of purity and the sanctity of God. Its ministers are clothed in white cloth. They observe the laws of continence prescribed to Jewish priests when they served in the Temple. Strict rules mark the periods when women participate in the rites of the cult. The water intended for ritual blessings can be brought only by a young woman who is a virgin. The official day of rest is Saturday. On that day the followers of Mahou (Almighty God) do not work in the fields. Once a year they offer a solemn sacrifice in an enclosure, outside the village. The priest takes in his hands a sheep which must be white. Three times he raises it towards the heavens. A part of the soup (made from the slain lamb) is poured on the ground as an offering to God." ¹⁵

Herman rhetorically asks: "This purification, this triple oblation of the sacrifice, this sacred repast in common, this Saturday sanctified by rest, does not all this recall old Biblical tradition?" ¹⁶ Obviously, his answer is yes!

Elsewhere in the series on Dahomey, Professor Williams talks about a map published in a 1790 edition of the Memoirs of the Reign of Bassa Ahadee, King of Dahomey by Robert Norris. It was an eye-witness account. The map shown in both the English and French editions designate the region surrounding the town of Whydah as the "Country of the Jews." In fact the town itself is called Juda ¹⁷ or Ouidah.

Here we have visible evidence of a Jewish population living in the very heart of Black Africa. As we have seen, the entire area beyond the immediate region of Whydah also is rooted in Hebrew culture. The author simply pinpoints an area which contained a Hebraic tradition which he was able to recognize.

The existence of an active Jewish community in this region is confirmed by a native of Whydah whose name is Bata Kindai Amgoza. He writes in a Scribner's Magazine article that the "B'nai Ephram...have copies of the Torah kept in a most holy placeOtherwise they are simply naked negro" people like everyone else.¹⁸ Dr. J. Kreppel in his book about Jews and Judaism also reports a large Jewish community in the interior of Dahomey. He says "they have a central temple (and) a Pentateuch written in Hebrew letters."¹⁹

Besides the map in the book by Norris, we find reference to still another map, the existence of which confirms the integrity of the former. Pierre Bouche, a French historian, makes reference to an earlier map by Jean D'Anville that states the country of Nagos was formerly inhabited by Jews."²⁰ He says this view was found earlier in the writings of Edrisi, an Arab explorer of the Eleventh Century. He adds: "One finds among the black many Jewish customs."²¹

Ghana

We are told by Reverend Christian Reindorf, a black pastor of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast, about the High Priest of the Akra people. He asserts: "A close inspection of the priest in his officiating garb leads to the conviction that his worship must be of foreign origin....One is inclined to suppose that the Jewish system of worship in the Old Testament style has been either introduced by or imitated from the people who came out first to the (Gold) Coast."²²

Nigeria

G.T. Basden was for many years a missionary among the Ibo. These people live mainly in the south-eastern region of modern Nigeria though they can be found scattered throughout the entire country. Because these people are largely non-Moslem, it is likely that their ancestors were among the slaves transported to America and the West Indies.

According to Basden in his book Among the Ibo of Nigeria, "there are certain customs which point to Levitic influence at a more or less remote time. This is suggested in the underlying ideas concerning sacrifice and in the practice of circumcision. The language also bears several interesting parallels with Hebrew idiom."²³ He later notes that "among the Ibo people there is a distinct recognition of a Supreme Being beneficent in character - who is above every other spirit, good or evil. He is believed to control all things in heaven and earth, and dispenses rewards and punishments according to merit."²⁴

Besides the Ibo, we also find reference to Judaism in the northern half of the country populated today largely by the Hausa and Fulani (Feul or Peul) peoples. Edmond D. Morel devotes considerable space to the Fulani in his book Affairs of West Africa. He concludes that after the overthrow of the Hyksos rulers in Egypt, many of their Hebrew kinsmen found their way into the interior of Africa by way of Cyrenaica (Libya).²⁵ He remarks a few pages later that "the Hebraic flavor, if one may put it so, which seem to permeate many of the Fulani customs...has been recorded by many observers."²⁶

Perhaps even more revealing are the following comments which Morel made in his book in connection with the experiences of his friend, Captain de Guiraudon, who lived for several years among the Fulani in the Senegambia region. Morel says he "was particularly struck by their peculiar knowledge of Jewish history. So familiarly did they speak of the chief Hebrew personalities of the Old Testament, and so well posted were they with the principle events related in it that they could not...have acquired their knowledge through Arabic sources.

"They referred to those times as though dealing with their own national records. Moses and Abraham might have been individuals of the same race as themselves. (Morel quotes Guiraudon that) 'in their oral legends Moses plays a very important part, and although certain passages of the Scripture are transformed or rather assimilated, they have so intense a Biblical and Hebraic tone as to exclude all Arabic influence.'" The strongest evidence of their direct relationship to a Hebrew past rests in the fact, as Guiraudon notes, "that their Israelite chronicles ceased after Solomon."²⁷

Guiraudon's conclusions are best summarized in his own words. He says "It would seem as if the Fulani...were at least in permanent contact with the Jewish people in remote times."²⁸ Morel himself concludes that the Fulani "are the lineal descendants of the Hyksos," whom he identifies as Hebrews, "having migrated westward with the overthrow of the Shepherd conquerors....Their presence in West Africa dates back at least 2,500 years."²⁹

Maurice Abadie, a French historian, asserts that "the Semitic origin of the Peuls (Fulani) of the Niger...cannot be questioned."³⁰

He believes Jews from North Africa also joined their brethren many years later in the Second Century A.D. to found the Empire of Ghana.³¹ Dr. Williams thinks it therefore is not surprising to find the Fulani also living in the neighboring lands of the Cameroons and Senegal.³²

Central Africa (Congo, Angola, Kenya, etc.)

In Chapter Three, we noted on page 7 that scholars believe there is a common origin for the Ashanti and Bantu peoples. They both came, it is thought, from the northeastern part of the continent. The Ashanti eventually migrated westward below and roughly parallel to the Sahara Desert; the Bantu moved mainly in south and southwestward directions. Today we find the Bantu peoples a majority throughout Central Africa in a belt extending from Zambia and Mozambique on the east coast through the Central African Republic (formerly French Equatorial Africa) to the Congo and Angola on the west coast.

Because most Black Americans are not related directly to the Bantu, we will abbreviate our discussion about them. However their significance historically (and in modern times) should not be overlooked. Our knowledge of their Hebrew traditions simply confirms what we already know about West Africa and that the Hebrew strain exists in Black Africa far more extensively than most realize.

In the Congo, Herbert Ward says there exists a remarkable affinity of certain customs to ancient Hebrew law. He notes, for example, that "if adultery is committed within the village, both man and woman are considered equally guilty; outside the village boundary, however, the man only is held at fault."³³ Professor Keller of Yale University reports that many West African funeral customs are in the same class with the ritual "sackcloth and ashes" of the Old Testament.³⁴

Farther south, in Angola, we learn from W. Merlin Ennis that "there are many indications that there was at least a common source from which arose the Hebrew culture; and that this (Angolan culture) arose from that. There are many place names in Palestine and more especially in the eastern end of the Arabian peninsula (which also was inhabited by Jews in pre-Islamic times) that resemble Bantu names."³⁵

John Clarke, a British missionary, writes in 1848 that Oldendorf, an earlier traveler in the region then called French Equatorial Africa, "speaks of black Jews being in this part of Africa."³⁶ Dr. Friedrich Ratzel also speaks about the "Mavumba, renowned as potters and smiths, to whom some assign a Jewish origin."³⁷

Father Guiseppe Ciatti spent several years at the Kaheti Catholic Mission in Kenya. In a manuscript written in September, 1932, he says "it can be easily concluded that the Agekoyo have had some contact with the Hebrews after their departure from Egypt."³⁸

He then enumerates. Leviticus 28:1-23, he says "is rigorous law for the Agekoyo." Exodus 21:35,36 "is scrupulously observed." The same he says is true of Exodus 22:10,13,18,22 and Exodus 23:4,19,22 which "are fully observed precisely as written." Leviticus 19:14,26,32,33 "are also laws of the tribe."³⁹

In summary we see clearly that Hebrew religion and culture permeated Black Africa from coast to coast, and represents the very core of the native civilization however much it may have become corrupted through the centuries. The interactions arose during centuries when close personal contacts were required. No radio, television or similar means of instant or mass communication had been invented. As a consequence, there can be doubt about the veracity and logic of Williams and many other scholars that Black Africa is infused with Hebrew blood besides being rooted in its culture.

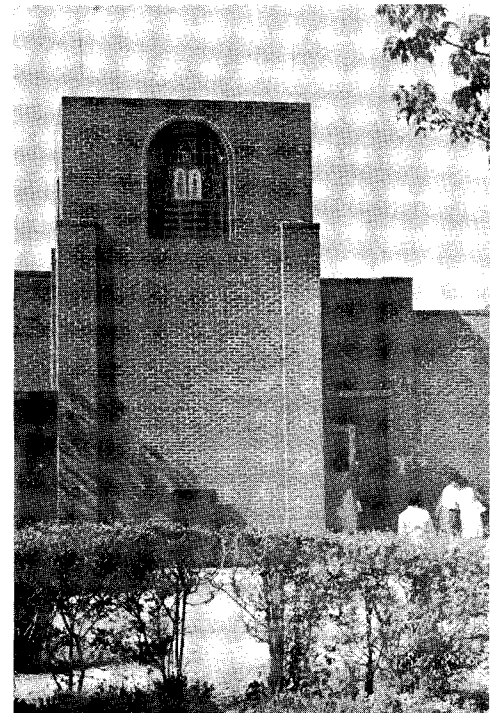
We have concentrated our analysis mainly on pre-Exilic times. This refers to the centuries before 586 B.C. when the First Temple was destroyed. As most students of religion know, this pre-Exilic period included the Mosaic era about 1225 B.C. and the reigns of Kings Saul, David and Solomon, the last from 972 to 933 B.C.

The reason we have concentrated on this period in antiquity is to establish once and for all times that Black Africans, and their Black American descendants, are part of the "root stock" of what are commonly called the Original Israelites. We do not wish to minimize the significance of the continuous series of events which led to the establishment of the Ghanian and Songhai Hebrew empires of later centuries. However, any attempt tell this part of the story would require many more pages, all of which simply reinforce the conclusions already reached.

The remainder of our book, therefore, is devoted to a discussion of the human links between Black Africa and the Hebrew Middle East. It is a discussion which dates back to the Patriarch Abraham. In this way, we hope to contribute to a better understanding of history by everyone and particularly for black people whose spiritual and cultural reawakening has just now begun.



AFRO-AMERICAN HEBREW LEADERS



TEMPLE BETH EL - VIRGINIA



HEBREW EDUCATION



West Africa

AFRICAN JEWS

Ethiopia



African Hebrews : the Offspring of Abraham

This chapter, as we indicated at the end of the last one, is devoted mainly to establishing the human links between the Middle East and Africa, particularly that region known as Black West Africa. We established in previous chapters that Hebrew beliefs and culture are foundationstones of native black African civilization. Obviously this did not occur by magic. It happened through the course of human events.

For this reason, we will explore in this chapter some of the evidence about the movements from the Middle East into Africa beginning in the ancient Biblical era. Notice we use the word "movements" in the plural. The reason is because Hebrew penetration into the heart and soul of black Africa came in waves over a long period of time. At best, we can divide these movements into arbitrary periods.

Our purpose is not to pinpoint each and every wave or movement. That is impossible. Nor is it our purpose to discuss every important one. We simply want to bring to the attention of the reader some of the very earliest ones, particularly those dating back to Biblical days, to establish once and for all that most black Americans are, in fact, descendants of the "original" Israelites.

To start our investigation, Professor Samuel A.B. Mercer, an expert in Biblical history, informs us that "About 1650 B.C., Jacob and his family went into Egypt and sojourned there, according to Biblical tradition, about 430 years." ¹ In other words, Hebrews settled in Egypt no later than 1650 B.C. and remained at least until 1220 B.C. when Moses led them out of bondage.

According to Professor Mercer, "this was a time of great migrations; and we find that the Hyksos, a Semitic people, a branch of whom Jacob and his family may well have been, entered Egypt and became rulers of the land." To support this, Mercer observes that "scarabs of a Hyksos ruler gave his name as Jacob-her or Jacob-el," the latter name meaning God of Jacob, a common Hebrew appellation. ²

Dr. Harry Orlinsky, a Professor of Bible at Hebrew Union College, says the word "Hyksos" means "rulers of foreign countries." ³ To the ancient Egyptians that meant people who came from the Middle East. This view is held by most historians. Professor Williams notes that "the Pharaoh who showed friendship to Joseph and his (Hebrew) brethren must really have belonged to the shepherd race. This fact might easily explain the enmity and persecution to which the Hebrews were subjected after the expulsion of their kinsfolk, the Hyksos (about 1580 B.C.)" ⁴

In summary, we see that the Hebrews reached Africa no later than 1650 B.C., or more than 3,600 years ago. Their presence in Egypt, which began peacefully under so-called Hyksos rule, eventually deteriorated through discrimination, persecution and ultimately bondage. About 1220 B.C. they gained their freedom under the leadership of Moses.

It is clear, however, that not everyone left Egypt with Moses. Professor Sidney Mendelssohn in his book Jews in Africa tells us that "when the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea....the exodus was by no means universal." Edmond Fleg in his The Life of Moses observes that there is a Rabbinic tradition that at the time of the Exodus "many Israelites...remained with the Egyptians."⁶

What happened to those Israelites who remained in Egypt after the exodus northward into the Holy Land led by Moses? The answer is two-fold: Many remained in Egypt for centuries as Mendelssohn and Fleg tell us. Others migrated south and westward into the heart of Africa as Williams and other scholars tell us.

Edmond D. Morel tells us that the Fulani and related West African peoples are the "lineal descendants" of these Hyksos and other Hebrew migrants.⁷ Williams says the "gradual migration of the Jews is perhaps the simplest, if not the only plausible explanation" for finding a black Hebrew culture throughout West Africa not to overlook the Bantu country of Central and Eastern Africa.⁸ These conclusions in turn are affirmed by the fact that scholars believe the ancestors of the Fulani, Ashanti, Ewe, Yoruba, Bantu and other peoples traveled the same routes.⁹

Another early period of Israelite migration into Africa was climaxed during the reign of King Solomon who ruled between the years 972 and 933 B.C. It was during this period that Solomon through his numerous political and marital alliances greatly extended Israelite influence in Ethiopia, the Sudan and neighboring lands.

Although some historians differ in certain particulars, the Ethiopians believe themselves descended from the earlier inhabitants of the ancient kingdom established by King Solomon and his wife, the Queen of Sheba, and their son, Bayna-Lehkem or Menelik as he commonly is called.

Confirmation of this general theory comes from F. Balthazaar Tellez who wrote in 1710 that "there were always Jews in Ethiopia from the beginning."¹⁰ Professor Mendelssohn says "this statement (by Tellez) may be conjecturally justified by the proximity of Abyssinia, Ethiopia and their dependencies to the ancient homes of the Israelites in Egypt and Palestine."¹¹

In fact, Sir Walter Plowden, British Consul General to Ethiopia about 1868 maintains "Two things are certain: that at a far later period, six sovereigns of pure Jewish race and faith reigned at Gondar (Ethiopia)....I think it also highly probable that the whole of Abyssinia was of the Jewish persuasion previous to its conversion (to Christianity in the Fourth Century A.D.)"¹²

Louis J. Morie, a French historian, thinks the Falasha Jews of Ethiopia derive from the tribe of Levi.¹³ The word Falasha is the name commonly given Ethiopians who still practice Judaism. Job Leutholf, among others, says the word means Exiles, to designate their origin from the Holy Land.¹⁴ And many, says Dr. George A. Barton in his Jewish Encyclopedia contribution, believe "they derive from exiles, possibly after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom (of Israel) but more probably from Judea after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans."¹⁵

The Bible provides us with still more evidence that Israelites lived in Ethiopia and the Sudan. The Prophet Isaiah, who lived about 725 B.C., believed that "the Lord shall set forth his hand a second time to recover the remnant of his people...from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros (Upper Egypt) and from Cush (now Ethiopia and the Sudan)."¹⁶ Only 70 years later another Hebrew prophet, Zephaniah, was to say "From beyond the river of Ethiopia my supplicants, even the daughters of my dispersed, shall bring my offering."¹⁷

That an Israelite population already inhabited the inland heart of Black Africa at this time is recorded by John Leo Africanus, a Fifteenth Century geographer and historian. In a translation of his book A Geographical History of Africa by John Pory, Africanus records that at the beginning of the Ethiopian Hebrew Empire founded by King Solomon "there inhabiteth a most populous nation of Jewish stock" west of the Nile below the Sahara in a region between "Abassin (Ethiopia) and Congo."¹⁸

A look at any map reveals that the region referred to by African inhabited by Jews in the Seventh and Eighth Centuries B.C. and afterward is precisely the "Chad-Nile area" that Dixon¹⁹ and other scholars²⁰ say the root stock of Black Africans came, bringing with them the Hebrew customs of their forefathers as we have seen.

At this point, it might be worth noting that the concept of the modern "black" man was largely unknown in ancient times. The modern concept to which we have reference is the one which classifies as black or colored anyone who is not pure white or does not have very distinctively Caucasian features. This concept is one of later European origin, and a distortion of historical fact.

Most historians agree that the original Israelites bear little if any resemblance to the so-called "white" Jews of modern Europe and America. This is especially significant because it helps us better understand what is meant by the term "black" Jew. In addition, we can better accept the fact that Americans of Black African descent are related by blood and culture to the very earliest Israelites.

The conclusion that most white Jews do not descend from Israelites in the racial sense is affirmed by many scholars. Professor Karl Kautsky in his book Are the Jews A Race? summarizes the situation as follows: "A mixed race from the start, the Jews in the course of their migrations have come into contact with a great succession of new races and their blood has become more and more mixed." ²¹

Kautsky informs us that "As early as 139 B.C., Jews were deported from Rome because they made proselytes in Italy. It is reported from Antioch (in modern-day Turkey) that the majority of the Jewish congregation in town consisted of converts to Judaism, not of Jews by birth. Conditions must have been similar in many other places. This fact alone shows the absurdity of the effort to explain traits of the (white) Jews on the basis of their race." ²²

An Oxford University scholar, Professor Griffith Taylor, writes: "There is of course little relationship between the original Semitic Jews of Syria and the Russian Jew of Poland and vicinity." This diversity is explained "mainly by an extensive proselytizing movement among the Southern Russians in the early centuries of our era." Indeed he affirms that the "Jews are not a race, but only a people." ²³

Professor Eugene Pittard summarizes the ethnic situation of white Jews in this way: "It seems to us that the least informed reader will come to the conclusion that no Jewish race exists in the zoological sense of the word. The Jews constitute a religious and social community, certainly very strong and coherent; but its (racial) elements are heterogeneous in the extreme." ²⁴

Even Biblical evidence reveals that those who inhabited Palestine in that era were products of marriages with those of other groups. For instance, Juda, the son of Jacob, took a Canaanite wife (Genesis 38:2). Joseph married an Egyptian woman (Genesis 4:45). Sampson married a Philistine (Judges 14:2f.) Solomon married wives from several different nations including the daughter of an Egyptian Pharaoh (I Kings 3:1). And his son, Roboam, who was to succeed him, was born of an Ammonite mother (I Kings 14:31). And it is doubtful that these women ever were formally converted in any modern sense of that word.

In retrospect, we see that the Hebrew peoples were a diverse peoples almost from the start. They had no single ethnic background. Because we know that the black African heritage is rooted deeply in this ancient stock, it therefore should not be surprising to discover that the very first Israelites, those who started with Abraham, were themselves black, at least in terms of contemporary definition.

That Abraham and his followers were black is not only plausible in terms of our contemporary concepts of color and race. It is a fact supported by certain Biblical passages and archeological discoveries relating to that period some 4,000 years ago.

The Bible everyone agrees serves as a source of religious inspiration for Jews as well as Christians and Moslems. More than that, it also is a source of historical information. Its main historical significance is not in the literal interpretation but in its broader implications

In this framework, we might examine the Biblical account in Genesis 10:8-10 that "Cush begat Nimrod (whose) kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar." This means, according to the Encyclopedia Americana section on Nimrod, that he "was a Cushite, that he established the kingdom of Shinar (about 2450 B.C.), the classic Babylonia, (and) extended his kingdom northward along the Tigris over Assyria."²⁵

W. Max Muller, Professor of Bible Exegesis, says in his article in the Jewish Encyclopedia that Cush "evidently means the ancestors of the Nubians"²⁶ who inhabited modern Ethiopia and Sudan. These facts affirm another Biblical account, Genesis 2:13, that the Gihon River bordered the land of "Ethiopia." This river today flows through the Caucasus mountains to the northern border of ancient Babylonia.

Significantly, the Bible in Genesis 2:11-12 also calls this same region the "Land of Havilah." According to the section on this subject in the Encyclopedia Americana, reference to Havilah is to a region that "was INHABITED by the sons of Cush."²⁷ In short, Babylonia at the time of King Nimrod was known variously as Shinar, Ethiopia and Havilah, the last two words signifying rule and inhabitation by Cushites or black people.

Some scholars prefer to place Havilah mainly along the Persian Gulf shores of the Arabian peninsula. This view, however, is entirely consistent with Havilah also being part of the Babylonian kingdom of Nimrod. The reason is because the two areas are next to each other or, more precisely, continuations of the same area. A.H. Sayce, a Professor of Assyriology at Oxford University, notes that the Bible in Micah 5:6 refers to the "land of Assyria" and the "land of Nimrod" as synonyms or duplicates of each other in the same verse, a common grammatical style in those days. This fact he says signifies that the domain of King Nimrod was the Empire of Assyria which then extended into and included the Arabian peninsula.²⁸

The fact that black people lived in southern Babylonia along the shores of the Persian Gulf extending into Arabia is verified by certain archeological discoveries. George G. Cameron of the Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Chicago tells us that "there is some evidence that a protonegroid population

once extended westward from India along the shores of the Persian Gulf." The word "proto" is defined in the American College Dictionary as "a word element meaning 'first,' 'earliest form of.'"

Sir Harry Johnston, the noted authority on black anthropology and culture, observes "There is a curliness of the hair, together with a negro eye and full lips in the portraiture of Assyria which conveys the idea of an evident negro element in Babylonia." He also makes reference in the same section of his book to "the Asiatic negroid strain of Jews,"³⁰ undoubtedly referring to those living in the Persian Gulf area.

Thus we have documentation that a negroid or black population lived in ancient Babylonia which the Bible says was called Shinar, Ethiopia and the Land of Havilah and which was ruled by King Nimrod about 2450 B.C. The question arises, why does the Bible put such stress on the Ethiopic origin of King Nimrod and his kingdom and what has this to do with the "original" Israelites? The answer is that his reign or dynasty coincides with certain written records about Abraham, the first Israelite, and Ur, the city-state from where Abraham came.

According to both Arabic and Jewish histories, King Nimrod plays an important part in the early life of Abraham. In the Babylonian Talmud of the ancient Jews, we find for example reference to King Nimrod wanting possession of the child Abraham from the latter's father, Terah.³¹ In Arabic history, Terah is portrayed as the chief vizier or minister of state to King Nimrod. Moreover "a statement of the Arabic writer-historian Yokut (is) that Hawil (viz., Havilah) was the dialect spoken" by the descendants of Midian, the son of Abraham.³² The word Havilah, from which Hawil derives, refers to land inhabited by Cushites or black people as we just learned.

More generally, Alfred Louis Kroeber, Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, notes that "some scholars find similarities between the Sumerian of Early Babylonia and Modern African languages."³³ This conclusion helps support the more specific findings that the dialect of Abraham's family was of African origin.

Still another fact ties together the relationship of King Nimrod to Abraham. That is that the city-state of Ur, from where Abraham descended, was located in the southern plain of Babylonia very near the shores of the Persian Gulf. George B. Cameron says with reference to the years between 2500 and 2200 B.C. that during this period "the influence of Ur reigned supreme."³⁴ This period almost precisely coincides with the time when King Nimrod established his dynasty circa 2450 B.C. in this very same area.

Although it is difficult to postulate the exact circumstances about anyone who lived in antiquity, it seems plausible that one of the motives for Abraham leaving his home in Ur was the royal court intrigues to which he was subjected. This can be inferred from Genesis 13:2 which says that Abraham "was very rich in cattle, in gold and in silver" when we went to Egypt to get permission from the Pharaoh to settle in the Land of Canaan.³⁵

In summary, Abraham appears to have come from among the ruling classes of a Cushite or black dynasty founded by King Nimrod and which inhabited the vicinity of the Persian Gulf in southern Babylonia. His father appears to have been an important minister in the court of this king. And the language of his family probably was a Cushite or African tongue spoken by those who lived there.

The Bible tends to confirm this view elsewhere. The Prophecy of Daniel (7:9) written in Babylonia refers to the Ancient of Days whose garment was snow white and "the hair on his head (was) like pure wool." Biblical scholars assign this reference to God. However it refers in the anthropomorphic sense to a prototype Israelite. In all likelihood it refers to Abraham himself as he is considered the prototype of all Israelites. In any event, one thing is certain. It is a physical description which only fits a black person as we know him today. Who else, pray tell, has woolly hair!

Even though we can tie Abraham to the Cushite dynasty of King Nimrod, the question remains about his relationship to the Semites. The answer is that the term "Semite" has come to mean something different from which it originally was intended. Historically, the ancient Semites were not a single or unified race but a group of disparate ethnic groups with, at most, a common cultural background.

Dr. Allen H. Godbey, Professor of Bible at Duke University, concludes "there is no such thing as a Semitic race. We use the term Semitic to describe a type of language and a sort of culture which we can trace by means of that type of language."³⁶ Even Biblical language can not be accepted literally for the explanation. For instance, the Bible in Genesis 10:22 says the Elamites were "children" of the Semites. Most scholars reject this literal interpretation. Instead, they accept the view expressed in The Biblical World that the relationship only reflects "a cultural fusion," and nothing more.³⁷

Because it is culture and not race which is basic in the historical determination of who is Semitic, it is not difficult to envision dark-skinned Semites of Cushite origin. We already have noted the Cushite antecedents of Abraham. In addition, we have the support of certain Biblical passages of later date. For example, in the writings called Lamentations, generally ascribed to the Prophet Jeremiah, we have evidence that Israelites living about 600 B.C. still retained a dark-skinned appearance. Lamentations 5:10 records that "our skin was black like an oven," as an illustration.

The close connection between Semites and Africa is further evidenced by the comments of certain scholars. For instance, G.R. Latham in his book Man and His Migrations has "the conviction ...that the Semitic tongues are simply African and that all theories suggested by the term Indo-European must be abandoned."³⁸ Dr. Sterling Means says "the language we call Hebrew is nothing but a derivation or branch of the African tongue."³⁹ And Dr. George A. Barton, Professor of Semitic Languages, cites in the Jewish Encyclopedia that "From Southern Arabia emigrants...established themselves in Africa....These Semites are known as Ethiopians." And they came, as you will note, from the direction of Havilah, the region inhabited by the Cushite descendants of Abraham.

Without exploring other areas of Biblical and Middle East history, the preceding examples of the existence of a black proto-Israelite civilization under Abraham, and their ultimate infusion into the blood and culture of native black Africa dating back to the eras of Moses and Solomon should suffice to prove once and for all that the black man is part and parcel of the root stock of the original Israelites. The full extent of this ancient civilization is visible throughout Black Africa, not merely as subsidiary or secondary influences, but as underlying concepts in the beliefs and practices of native Black Africa.⁴⁰

Africa is the Homeland of Judaism Too !

In one respect the previous chapter may be misleading. It may give the mistaken impression that Africa is merely the recipient of a culture that originated in another continent, Asia, and was ultimately transmitted to Africa starting in antiquity. This impression is totally incorrect.

The fact is that many if not most of the key events that shaped Judaism and its subsequent influence on world civilization began in Africa. And this influence

The fact is that many if not most of the key events that shaped Judaism and its subsequent influence on world civilization began in Africa. And these events, to the extent they underlie native black African culture and beliefs, never left Africa. Here are some of the reasons for this conclusion:

- #1 Abraham appears to have been of Cushite or African descent.
- #2 Abraham first traveled to Africa where he received permission to settle in the Land of Canaan.
- #3 Moses, in many ways the founder of Judaism as we know it today, was born in Africa.
- #4 The scene of the all-important Mosaic Revelation, when the Ten Commandments were given, occurred in the Sinai peninsula, a part of Africa.
- #5 The Levitical Laws of the Pentateuch, including the establishment of the Day of Atonement and Passover, were formulated in Africa.

In addition, we have already seen the evidence that native African Hebrews settled Black Africa through their Ashanti, Fulani, Songhai, Bantu and other related ancestors.

The final result is that what commonly is known as native black African civilization is rooted in a Hebrew culture as much at home in the soil of Africa as in the Middle East. To be sure, it contains much that is alien and corrupt as is true in Europe and Asia as well. But this does not negate the fact that most black Americans descend from the "root stock" of the earliest Hebrews.

Black Americans can be proud of their African-Israelite ancestry. It is an integral part of their heritage, not just an alien overlay. It has played a major role in shaping world civilization. And to the extent this ancestry is important to peoples of other races and colors, it reflects the full glory of a united humanity.

The African Israelites of the United States

Rootless! This word, which means without roots, summarizes the plight of the Black man in America. Ruthlessly torn from his African roots, the black man was cast into slavery and denied his humanity. He was treated worse than an animal. Upon emancipation, he was left homeless, illiterate, impoverished, politically powerless, and without a family structure on which to draw sustenance. He had nothing but alien cultural and spiritual substitutes to comfort him in his anguish.

The book THE HEBREW HERITAGE OF OUR WEST AFRICAN ANCESTORS tells the black man where his spiritual and cultural roots really are. It is, as we have seen, to be found in the Hebrew heritage of the Ashanti, and their Yoruba, Fulani, Songhai and kindred ancestors.

There are many thousands of black people in the United States who have awakened to the fact that they are descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel. There are over 250 congregations and other organizations throughout the country as testimony to this fact.

Among the early pioneers of the Israelite movement Rabbi William Crowdy was among the first. He founded the Beth El Temple association of Prophetic Judaism after Emancipation during the last half of the Nineteenth Century. Today, there are more than 50 temples which belong to this particular group. Its present Senior Rabbi is Howard Zebulon Plummer.

There exist many other black Israelite congregations and centers. In 1915, there already were at least eight congregations in the New York City area alone. At that time, they had the benefit of learning about their heritage from black Hebrews who came from such far-flung places as Ethiopia, the West Indies, India, and North and West Africa. Some of the early leaders included Rabbi Joshua Ford who presided over B'nai Beth Abraham, Rabbi Israel ben Newman, Congregation Beth Zion, and Rabbi Wentworth Matthew of the Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation of Harlem.

Altogether there presently are more than two dozen congregations in New York, some fifteen in Philadelphia, and temples and centers in Chicago, Los Angeles, Youngstown, Ohio, and elsewhere. There also are revitalized Israelite communities in the West Indies, Nigeria, East Africa, Israel, and other parts of the world.

Besides their usual activities, most Afro-Israelite congregations have a program called "reclamation." Although similar in some respects to conversion, its purpose unlike the former is to assist the individual to reclaim for himself or herself his or her original African Hebrew heritage.

Most Israelite congregations have their own schools where they teach the Torah (Bible) for its moral, cultural and spiritual insights, as well as African Hebrew language, songs and dances, history and rituals. Emphasis is placed on education, good deeds, manliness and an equal role for women. They celebrate the major Hebrew holidays including Rosh Hashona (New Year), Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), Passover and the Sabbath. In addition to teaching African Hebrew history and culture, many congregations have instituted courses in Twi (Ashanti), Yoruba and related West African languages.

In addition, the Afro-Israelites have their own schools of higher learning such as the Ethiopian Hebrew College in New York. Beth El Temple has its own seminary for training rabbis in Virginia. The Afro-Asian Israelite Cultural Center in Philadelphia also conducts elementary and advanced courses in all phases of Israelite life. To offset the negative effects of racism which has permeated our American society nearly its entire existence, Black Israel places special emphasis in its own noble heritage. This book is one such endeavor.

For additional information about the black Israelite community in your city or state, contact the Afro-Asian Israelite Cultural Center. Its address is 616 Woodlawn Street, Philadelphia Pennsylvania, 19144. Address your letter to the Director. All personal correspondence is kept in strictest confidence. Additional copies of this book can be gotten from this Center or by writing the publisher.

ASHANTI SAYINGS:

WOPE AKA ASEM AKYERE ONYANKOPON A, KA
KYERE MFRAMA - If you want to talk to
God, tell it to the winds.

ONYAME NKRABEA MI KWATIBEA - The des-
tiny God has assigned you cannot be
avoided.

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CHAPTER 8. AFRICA IS THE HOMELAND OF JUDAISM TOO!

CHAPTER 9. THE AFRICAN ISRAELITES OF THE UNITED STATES

Other Rose-Lee Inc Publications

AN ISRAELITE VIEW OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Some African Hebrew Goals and Purposes

-- by Rudolph R. Windsor

1. To teach our African Hebrew history, language and culture.
2. To teach our children to respect their parents, teachers, neighbors, property, and themselves.
3. To teach and advocate strong and stable family ties which is the basic unit of any society or nation.
4. To encourage full participation and involvement of women in home as well as community life and activities, including their aspirations for education.
5. To stimulate the potentialities, creative powers, and other energies of our Afro-American brothers and sisters, and to direct them into constructive channels.
6. To support brotherhood and unity among African Hebrew Israelites and with other black people of whom we are part.
7. To support projects and activities of economic benefit to our community without which it cannot survive.
8. To uplift the poor and oppressed.
9. To support political and community leaders who will be accountable to the people, their needs and aspirations.
10. To encourage African Hebrew-Israelites to return to Palestine which always has been tied to the African continent in terms of history, culture, and peoples. (Thousands of people born in Africa or of African Hebrew descent live there today, including hundreds from America.)