



# 10 Questions for Black Hebrew Israelites

by Dumisani Washington and Masimba Musodza

Generally speaking, the Black Hebrew Israelites (BHI) are a sect of largely Messianic/Hebrew Roots Black Americans who believe that only they are the true Israelites of the Bible, and that other ethnic groups of Jews — especially White Europeans — are impostors, or “fake Jews.” There have been several groups in Africa and America that claim Jewish identity. They include the Jews of Rusape (Zimbabwe) who claim an ancient Hebrew origin, and the Igbo tribe of West Africa. Unlike the sect of BHI in America, they do not deny others a Jewish heritage, but in fact, they see the Jews of Europe as kindred.

While not all BHI believe that only they are the real Israel, the group that does seems to be growing quickly in the US, and some have very strong anti-Semitic, anti-Israel feelings. Also, the racially divisive rhetoric and attitudes have caused much strife within churches and families.

As a preview of his upcoming book, *Ten Questions for Black Hebrew Israelites*, author Dumisani Washington provides a brief overview of the main BHI themes.

(Note: The terms Israelite, Jew, and Hebrews are used interchangeably.)

## 1 If the “real Jews” are black (and brown), which shade of black is authentic?

Skin tone is not an accurate way of determining a person’s ethnicity. This is especially true for the Jewish people who have been scattered literally all over the world for some 2,700 years. So, if the BHI believe that only people of Black African descent — as well as West Indians and Native Americans — are true Israelites, how dark does a real Israelite have to be? How much melanin is genuine Hebrew?

## 2 If the “real Jews” are only from Africa, why does the bible speak of God gathering the Israelites, “from the four corners of the earth?” (Isaiah 11.12)

The Jewish people call the worldwide ingathering of the Israelites, The Redemption. The Redemption is spoken of repeatedly throughout the Bible, as lands in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe are specifically named. There is simply no biblical evidence to support claims that Jews are exclusively of African descent.

## 3 If the Jews were scattered all over the world, why are the Jews from Europe “fake”?

As stated in Question No. 2, Jewish presence in Europe is recorded in the bible (Joel 3.4-5; Acts 2.5-11). According to Jewish history, the Roman destruction of the Second Temple eventually saw Jews scattered across, “Africa, Asia, and Europe.”

## 4 Why does your movement never address the Mizrahi Jews of North Africa and the Middle East (Persia, Babylon, Libya), or the Sephardim of Latin America and the West Indies?

Almost million Mizrahi Jews were expelled from the Arabized lands of North Africa and the Middle East where they live for over 2,000 years. Jews who suffered persecution in Spain and Portugal in the 16th century fled to the Americas and the West Indies. The BHI generally ignore these historical facts about Israelite history, as they don’t perpetuate the myth of a solely African Israelite identity.

## **5 Why do you question the legitimacy of the Jewish state of Israel (as a White European construct), when over half of Israel's Jewish population is Mizrahi?**

There are some 7 million Jews who live in Israel. Over 50% are from North Africa and the Middle East. There are also over 125,000 Ethiopian Jewish Israelis. As a nation, Israel has people from some 100 countries – Jewish and non-Jewish, making it the most ethnically diverse nation in the region.

## **6 In attempting to prove African Hebrew identity, why does your movement only address the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, and never the Jews enslaved at the hands of Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Tyre, Sidon, and Rome? Or the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade led by Arab Muslims?**

One of the most oft-used scriptures within the Black Hebrew Israelite ideology is Deuteronomy 28.68. It describes God's punishment for Israel's idolatry being a return to Egypt, "on ships," and being sold as slaves. While an increasing number of scholars believe that the Igbo of West Africa are an Israelite tribe that was indeed included as human cargo during the slave trade, the Jewish people were enslaved many times throughout their history. Further, Tyre and Sidon were famous, wealthy seaport cities who sold Hebrew slaves to the Greeks (Joel 3.4-5).

## **7 Why do you blame European Jews for the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade when it was Arabs, Europeans, and Africans who were all responsible?**

Centuries before Europeans engaged in the African slave trade, Arab Muslims had conquered and enslaved all many of the indigenous peoples of North Africa. It is also historical fact that warring African tribes helped European slavers capture their African enemies. A small percentage of Jews in the American south owned slaves, as did Native Americans and some Black Americans.

One of the most prominent claims that Jews ran the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade is in a book produced by the Nation of Islam, *THE SECRET RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BLACKS AND JEWS* that has been debunked by several scholars including Dr. Henry Louis Gates. [1] From its inception, the Nation of Islam has been hostile to Jews and bitterly opposed to Zionism the State of Israel.

## **8 Why do you use the term "Edomite" for White people, when Edom (Esau) was the brother of Jacob (Israel)? Aren't you in essence (errantly) saying that White Europeans descended from Israel's brother?**

Historically, the term "Edom" has been used in Judaism to refer to Roman or Christian enemies of the Jews. It is a metaphor, as "Edom" (Esau) was not Roman but a Semite descended from Abraham, just like his twin brother, Jacob. But many within the BHI use "Edom" to literally describe White Europeans. This is both factually incorrect as well as illogical.

## **9 Why do you call European Jews the, "synagogue of Satan who say they are Jews and do lie," when that passage of scripture could just as easily be used against you?**

If Deuteronomy 28.68 is a favorite BHI scripture, Revelation 2.9 is a close second. When the Apostle John used the term, "synagogue of Satan," to refer to Jewish impostors, he was literally referring to Gentiles who falsely claimed a Jewish birthright. There is nothing in the verse that implies the wholly Blackness of the Jews, or that the perpetrators were such because they were White. This is a classic case of reading modern, confused notions of race into an ancient text.

## **10 Why do you have to attack other Jews in order to discover biblical truth for yourself?**

There are many Black Christians who are discovering the Hebrew roots of their faith in Jesus (Yeshua). This includes more serious study of the Jewish Law (Torah) and Prophets, as well as the history of the Jewish Diaspora. In so doing, some are also discovering the history of African Jewish communities such as Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews), the Lemba Jews of Southern Africa, and the Igbo of West Africa. However, true Torah study should not lead one further into hatred and divisiveness. If it does, then one is not truly studying Torah.

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/07/20/opinion/black-demagogues-and-pseudo-scholars.html>