

119

MINISTRIES

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Black Hebrew Israelites Refuted

Recently there was a huge story in the news about some high school kids “taunting” and “surrounding” an elderly Native American man in front of the Lincoln Memorial. This story was based on a short video clip that went viral, resulting in harsh condemnation of these kids as racists.

But as it turns out, the whole story was a fabrication. Full footage of the incident surfaced, showing that the high school kids didn’t “taunt” or “surround” the Native American man at all. They were singing school-spirit chants as the man pushed himself into the middle of their group. The kids continued their pep rally-style cheers and one kid nervously smiled as the Native American man played his drum inches away from the kid’s face. For this, the kids were called racists.

Basically, these kids were smeared with a false narrative contrived from an out-of-context video clip...but why were these kids randomly singing school spirit chants in front of the Lincoln Memorial to begin with?

As we can see in the full footage of this controversial encounter, there was a group of black men screaming taunts and insults at the children as the children waited for their bus. So the kids apparently decided they would sing their school chants to drown out the hateful insults being hurled at them by this group.

That’s right—this entire controversy was sparked by a small group of black men harassing these high school kids. This group was later identified as the “Black Hebrew Israelites.”

Since this story broke, a lot of questions have arisen about this group, what they believe, and their cause. In this teaching, we’re going to attempt to offer some clarification as well as address their errant and dangerous teachings.

The first thing to be aware of is that this group is apparently not monolithic, and they go by different names. For instance, they might be called African Hebrew Israelites, Black Hebrews, or Black Israelites.

Sects within this movement differ widely in their beliefs. For instance, some reject the Messiah and the

New Testament altogether while others claim to follow the Messiah and the New Testament. Among those who follow the New Testament, some groups reject Paul's letters. Some groups believe that the KJV version of the Bible is the authoritative English translation.

So there are a lot of differences. However, the one thing that they all seem to have in common is the belief that African Americans are the true descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Other ethnicities, such as Puerto Ricans and Native Americans, might also be descended from the tribes of Israel according to some Black Hebrew Israelite groups. The primary goal of Black Hebrew Israelites is to reach out to those whom they believe to be descendants of the twelve tribes of Israel and convince them of their heritage.

One Black Hebrew Israelite community known as the House of Israel writes:

Our chief mission is the uplifting of the so called Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans; who are the 12 Tribes of Israel. Through edification, news, and practical knowledge sharing.

We currently are expanding throughout continental U.S. bringing the word of the Lord to our brothers and sisters. We are told to go only to the lost sheepe of the House of Israel and bid them to the marriage. Which is coming back to the fold and raising up a nation under the law, statutes, and commandments of The Most High.

-House of Israel, "About Us," www.awakenisrael.info

Many of the more radical members of these Black Hebrew Israelite groups relentlessly proclaim that the Jewish people aren't true Jews but imposters from the "Synagogue of Satan." They will promote racist views against white people and Jews, often standing on streets and sidewalks and yelling at anyone who walks by.

Since many Black Hebrew Israelites spout extreme violent, racist, and anti-Semitic rhetoric, organizations like the Southern Poverty Law Center and Anti-Defamation League have classified some Black Hebrew Israelite groups, like the House of Israel, as "hate groups."

Lastly, and unfortunately, because Black Hebrew Israelites hold to a belief that they are the true descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, many of them practice aspects of the Torah, such as the Sabbath and dietary laws.

We say "unfortunately" because nothing about the theology or actions of this group reflects the true heart of Torah observance. So the fact that they claim Torah observance, hurts the reputation of those who keep Torah out of love for God and our neighbor.

A good comparison would be the Westboro Baptist Church, a hate group out of Topeka, KS, who travels around the country to protest at funerals. Through their false doctrine and hateful actions, they give all Christians a bad name. Because of the actions and beliefs of a few hypocritical bigots in a fringe cult, genuine believers are smeared as bigots as well.

It's the same case with the Black Hebrew Israelites. They are not genuine believers. They don't *really* keep the Torah. The Torah is based on loving others and loving YHWH. They are employing racist behaviors, sadly exposing them as frauds.

Before we move forward, it's important to clarify that the Black Hebrew Israelites have no connection historically or theologically with Ethiopian Jews, who are legitimate Jews.

So where do the Black Hebrew Israelites get this idea that they are the “true Jews” or the true descendants of the lost tribes of Israel?

This belief is primarily based on a misinterpretation of Deuteronomy 28:68. Black Hebrew Israelites assert that this verse is a prophecy about the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which was the transportation of African slaves to the Americas on ships between the 16th to 19th centuries.

Deuteronomy 28:68

And the Lord (YHWH) will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.

What's ironic about the use of this verse by Black Hebrew Israelites is that it completely undermines their entire theology. What do we mean?

First, there's no reason to assume that every single curse listed in Deuteronomy *has* come to pass. But even if we grant that premise, Africans are the one group of people we *know* this verse *cannot* apply to.

The verse says, “You will sell yourself.” The African slaves in the trans-Atlantic slave trade didn't sell themselves. They were horrifically kidnapped and then sold against their will. The verse also says, “But there will be no buyer.” Obviously this does not apply to Africans during the trans-Atlantic slave trade since they *had* buyers from all around the world!

Who and what *could* this verse apply to, then? The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the Old Testament offers a couple possibilities:

Assyrian kings of the seventh century coerced their vassals into supplying troops for their military campaigns. One way then for Israelites to return to Egypt in ships would be in the Assyrian campaigns launched from the Phoenician coast in which they were obliged to take part. This represents continued oppression by foreign enemies, as the curses have detailed. Another possibility would include falling victim to Egypt's slave trade in Syro-Palestine, where the slaves were often transported by ship.

-John Walton, Victor Matthews, & Mark Chavalas, “The IVP Bible Background Commentary on the Old Testament,” p. 204

The entire foundation of Black Hebrew Israelite theology is undermined by their own proof-text! If we take Deuteronomy 28:68 seriously, then it cannot apply to African slaves during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It simply doesn't work according to the text.

But why is this even an issue? Why do Black Hebrew Israelites try to find some sort of Scriptural basis for identifying themselves as physical descendants of the lost tribes of Israel? Do they think it gives them some kind of superior status in God's Kingdom—that God loves them more or something? Do they think it gives them some sort of justification for hating and condemning others on the basis of their race?

While it is not likely that everyone who investigates the possible identities of the lost tribes of Israel do so for racist reasons, it would appear that the more extreme and radical members of the Black Hebrew Israelites certainly are motivated in part, by racism. The vile rhetoric spewed by some members of this group on street corners and on their websites, calling white people “white devils” and spreading baseless conspiracy theories about Jews, leaves no doubt about that.

One of the passages that Black Hebrew Israelites misuse to support their hostility toward the Jews is Revelation 2:9 and 3:9:

Revelation 2:9

I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

Revelation 3:9

Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie—behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and they will learn that I have loved you.

“See!” say Black Hebrew Israelites, “Those who are regarded as Jews today are lying! They’re not really true Jews but are actually from the Synagogue of Satan!”

The problem with this argument is that it’s utterly false on every level. Just like we saw with Deuteronomy 28:68, this is a case of eisegesis—that is, reading one’s own agenda and bias into the text instead of properly interpreting it in context.

When John spoke of the synagogue of Satan, he was referring to a group of faithless Jews in his day that did not believe in Yeshua and who even opposed and persecuted Messiah followers. John, being Jewish himself, rebuked his fellow Jews with harsh language much in the same way that the biblical prophets in the *TANAKH* rebuked Israel. The Dead Sea Scroll community likewise used similar language to describe Jews who opposed their sect.

New Testament scholar, Dr. Craig Keener, writes:

Some other Jews (especially those who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls) condemned the rest of Israel as apostate, calling them even “the congregation of Satan.” John applies this harsh language **only to the believers’ direct opponents**. This is not a model for how Gentile Christians should address synagogues; this was the sort of intra-Jewish challenge that characterized strong debates about Jewish identity among various competing Jewish groups in this period.

-Craig Keener, “NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible: Bringing to Life the Ancient World of Scripture.”

Paul—also a Jew—does something similar in his letter to the Romans. He defines a “true Jew” as one who is not only Jewish on the basis of outward appearance alone but who also follows God’s Law:

Romans 2:25-29

For circumcision indeed is of value **if you obey the law**, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? Then he who is physically

uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.

The point is this, if you're Jewish, you better *do* what a true Jew does—follow the commands of the God of Israel. Otherwise your Jewishness is meaningless, spiritually speaking.

It'd be like a Christian preacher saying, "A true Christian lives in accordance with Christ's teachings. Anyone who claims Christ but rejects his teachings by persecuting other believers is a liar—they're not Christian at all but are being used by Satan."

Regardless, it's clear that these verses are not talking about the Jewish people today supposedly "lying" about being physical Jews. Black Hebrew Israelites are reading that idea into the text.

It should also be mentioned that many Black Hebrew Israelites hold to the Serpent Seed Doctrine in an effort to disparage Jewish people. We address this doctrine in our teaching, [Testing the Serpent Seed Doctrine](#).

To give a quick summary, it's asserted that the serpent in the Garden of Eden had sexual relations with Eve, and the offspring of their union was Cain. Black Hebrew Israelites are among several racist groups who will claim that the Jews, and any other race of people that they don't like, are descendants of Cain and therefore literal children of Satan.

When you test it out, it becomes obvious that this doctrine is a little absurd and without biblical basis. All of the supposed proof-texts are only possible if you are trying to force the belief onto the text—again, eisegesis.

For instance, it's claimed that when Eve says, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate" in Genesis 3:13 that the word "deceived" actually means *seduced*—therefore Eve is saying that the serpent seduced her into having sex with him. But the Hebrew word for "deceived" is used sixteen times in the Hebrew Scriptures and never once does it indicate anything sexual.

Not only that, but Genesis 4:1 clearly states that Cain was the offspring of Eve's union *with Adam*:

Genesis 4:1

Now **Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain**, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord."

Again, see our teaching, [Testing the Serpent Seed Doctrine](#), for a full treatment of this issue.

Another idea often promoted by Black Hebrew Israelites is that the Ashkenazi Jews are not "true Jews" because they come from the 8th century Khazar Empire, which supposedly converted in mass to Judaism. The Khazar were a Turkic nation whose semi-nomadic empire stretched from Southern Russia to the Caucasus Mountains. Some have proposed that the Ashkenazi Jews of Europe had fled from Khazaria, and therefore they came from the Caucasus, not the Middle East, and thus have no physical connection to the "true" people of Israel. They are not true Jews by blood but are "imposters." "Fake Jews!" Black Hebrew Israelites will say.

Again, the problem with this argument is that it's utterly false on every level. There's simply no evidence that some unique Khazar race randomly woke up one morning, declared itself Jewish, and then moved to Germany. It's a baseless conspiracy theory.

In his article, "Ashkenazi Jews Are Not Khazars. Here's the Proof," Alexander Beider outlines several points debunking this theory.

1) There's no evidence of a large Jewish presence in the Khazar Empire. Beider writes:

As any historian will tell you, generations of Jews, like generations of any people, leave historical traces behind them. These traces come in multiple forms. For starters, people leave behind them historical documents and archaeological data. Predictably, **archaeological evidence about the widespread existence of Jews in Khazaria is almost nonexistent.** While a series of independent sources does testify to the existence in the 10th century of Jews in the Kingdom of Khazaria, and while some of these sources also indicate that the ruling elite of Khazaria embraced Judaism, the Khazarian state was destroyed by Russians during the 960s. **In other words, we can be confident that Judaism was not particularly widespread in that kingdom.**

The next historical record of Jews—in a few cities that today belong to western Ukraine and western Belarus—shows up in the 14th century, when Jews are regularly referred to in numerous documents. And yet, **no direct historiographical data is available to connect the Jews who lived in Eastern Europe in the 14th century with their co-religionists from the 10th century Khazaria.**

-Alexander Beider, "Ashkenazi Jews Are Not Khazars. Here's the Proof." www.forward.com

2) Linguistics, particularly the study of Yiddish, rule out a Khazarian ancestry for Ashkenazi Jews. Beider writes:

Since the 17th century, Yiddish was the vernacular language of all Jews of Eastern Europe. All its main structural elements **are German**, though during the past few centuries, they also underwent a strong influence of Slavic languages.

-Alexander Beider, "Ashkenazi Jews Are Not Khazars. Here's the Proof." www.forward.com

3) Onomastics, or the study of proper names, rules out a Khazarian ancestry for Ashkenazi Jews. Beider writes:

Looking at names, both first names and surnames, gives us a sense of how a community saw itself, its language and its origins. And in the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe over the past six centuries, **not a single Turkic name can be found in documents listing Jewish names.** Even in documents from the 15th to 16th centuries dealing with Jews who lived in the territories of modern Ukraine and Belarus have no such names.

-Alexander Beider, "Ashkenazi Jews Are Not Khazars. Here's the Proof." www.forward.com

4) Genetics rules out a Khazarian ancestry for Ashkenazi Jews.

According to a major study conducted by several scientific researches at Wayne University, Ashkenazi

Jews share genetic ancestry with other Jewish populations, and there is no evidence of a connection with populations from the Khazar region. The entire study is available on the Wayne University website. Here was the conclusion:

Employing a variety of standard techniques for the analysis of population-genetic structure, we find that Ashkenazi Jews share the greatest genetic ancestry with other Jewish populations, and among non-Jewish populations, with groups from Europe and the Middle East. **No particular similarity of Ashkenazi Jews with populations from the Caucasus is evident, particularly with the populations that most closely represent the Khazar region.** Thus, analysis of Ashkenazi Jews together with a large sample from the region of the Khazar Khaganate corroborates the earlier results that Ashkenazi Jews derive their ancestry primarily from populations of the Middle East and Europe, that they possess considerable shared ancestry with other Jewish populations, and that there is no indication of a significant genetic contribution either from within or from north of the Caucasus region.

*-Behar, Doron M.; Metspalu, Mait; Baran, Yael; Kopelman, Naama M.; Yunusbayev, Bayazit; Gladstein, Ariella; Tzur, Shay; Sahakyan, Havhannes; Bahmanimehr, Ardeshir; Yepiskoposyan, Levon; Tambets, Kristiina; Khusnutdinova, Elza K.; Kusniarevich, Aljona; Balanovsky, Oleg; Balanovsky, Elena; Kovacevic, Lejla; Marjanovic, Damir; Mihailov, Evelin; Kouvatsi, Anastasia; Traintaphyllidis, Costas; King, Roy J.; Semino, Ornella; Torrioni, Antonio; Hammer, Michael F.; Metspalu, Ene; Skorecki, Karl; Rosset, Saharon; Halperin, Eran; Villems, Richard; and Rosenberg, Noah A., "No Evidence from Genome-Wide Data of a Khazar Origin for the Ashkenazi Jews" (2013). Human Biology Open Access Pre-Prints. Paper 41.
http://digitalcommons.wayne.edu/humbiol_preprints/41*

All of the evidence is against the Khazar myth. But again, you have to wonder why so much effort is put into trying to disparage the Jewish people. Why are these conspiracy theories so prevalent within the Black Hebrew Israelite communities?

Black Hebrew Israelites are often looking for anything to justify their concerning views, and they think that discrediting the Jewish people as authentic Jews somehow gives them justification for declaring themselves to be the “true” chosen people because of their race. Such thinking is rather disturbing, and lead to racist thoughts and behaviors.

Yeshua and the apostles didn’t share the views of the Black Hebrew Israelites. While they certainly honored the Jewish people for their role in preserving the oracles of God, they didn’t teach that any race was superior to another. The gospel is to go forth to *all nations*. God’s heart is that *everyone*, regardless of ethnicity or lineage, would come to know Him. In Messiah’s Kingdom, Jews and Gentiles are one in Him (Ephesians 2). Furthermore, the kingdom is made up of people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Revelation 7:9).

Instead of trying to convince people that we are the “true descendants of the lost tribes of Israel”—something that can’t be proven—we should focus on what Yeshua said to focus on: making disciples of *all nations*. In the end it doesn’t matter whether you are Jew or Gentile. The real question is, do you know Yeshua? All of us need a Savior, regardless of our race. All of us are called to repent and to keep God’s commandments. Let’s focus on that.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

*Remember, continue to test everything.
Shalom!*

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverything.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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