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The Twelve Tribes of Israel: An Organizational Movement

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The Rastafarian Movement has been one of the most important movements of our time. It has proved to us that it is possible to make lemonade out of the lemons that are dealt to us, and that violence is not the only way to deal with troubles or get what you feel you deserve. It has also provided a system of faith and following for over 700,000 loyal people. A Social, political and religious explosion with as few negative connotations as possible, Rasta is just about as good as it gets.

Like all religious trees, Rasta has branched out into a variety of sub-movements, such as Nyabinghi, the Ethiopian National Congress or Bobo dreads, and the Twelve Tribes of Israel, just to name a few. The Twelve Tribes are especially interesting because they believe in salvation for all races, whereas the doctrines of other Rastas are exclusive to Blacks, primarily because of the very roots of the religion: Whites making slaves out of them. While this idea may seem quite revolutionary, there are other aspects of this movement that are completely receded. Frankly, the faith resembles its influences of Christianity and Judaism more than Rastafarianism, in a lot of instances.

The purpose of this paper is to shed a little bit of light on the widely unknown subject of this interesting and persistent movement. First I

will discuss the history of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, an ideal embraced primarily and whole-heartedly by the Jews.

The name 'Israel' comes from heaven. Most of us, when we hear the word 'Israel' think only of the Jews. But from the beginning they have had to share this title with a great many others, because in scripture the House of Israel consists of twelve tribes and the Jews are just one of those twelve.

Jacob was just an ordinary guy, living long before the birth of Jesus Christ. He had 2 wives who were sisters, and two slave-wives. Between them were born 12 boys. One night while these kids were young, an angel came to Jacob and they spent the entire evening wrestling. The angel was God. Surprisingly, God didn't annihilate this mere human, and the match ended in a stalemate. God then changed Jacob's name to Israel, which means, "rebel". Who else but a rebel would physically fight with the angel of God? He then told Israel about how important his twelve sons would soon come to be. Lo and behold, God was right. The sons grew to form large families, and so were to be entitled each a section of Israel's land, as the way of the times went. However, two of Israel's kids were not granted land-holding privileges. Israel adopted two sons of Joseph, making him one of the fathers of the future "Twelve Tribes", and Levi's tribe was given the task of caring for the Israeli priesthood. After this little bout of mix-up, the Twelve Tribes were settled. The final roundup included Reuben, Judah, Simeon, Naphtali, Dan, Gad, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manesseh, Asher, and Benjamin.

For a while, the tribes were flourishing in Palestine, but political and family drama, coupled with the horrors of "sin" (sin is a religious term meaning the act of doing something against God, or anything that is right) caused the nation of Israel to divide and eventually crumble. Attacked and taken away into foreign captivity by Assyria, ten of the twelve Hebrew tribes vanished from history. Soon, only a small remnant of two tribes remained in the Holy Land. The others had all disappeared -- melded into the genetic infrastructure of the human race. It is written that they were scattered to the four corners of the earth, awaiting a prophet to reunite them someday.

Then, a man named Vernon Carrington, a Rasta living in Jamaica, got a big idea. He happened to be a member of the local Jamaican chapter of the Ethiopian World Federation, Inc. This was not a sect of the Rasta religion, just a way of organizing the locals in Jamaica,

Cuba, and Central America. He realized that he was the reincarnation of Gad, one of the original sons of Israel, and that his duty was to reunite the lost Twelve Tribes.

"I was being converted in 1961 and I read the Bible from Genesis to Revelation twice. But I was being sent, I was called and sent, resurrected and sent to do this work and when I read the Bible I strongly see that there is a gap that is there to be filled and I believe that I am one of them that send to do it Do the work." -Carrington

Now known as the Prophet Gad (Gad was one of the original sons of Israel), he proceeded to read a chapter a day from his copy of the Bible, The Scofield Study Bible. Scofield was an "alcoholic lawyer turned preacher", and a faithful one at that, but he and Gad both receive much criticism for his traits. Gad began to live his life in a different way, attracting attention from everyone around. When he was bothered about his new actions, he kept telling people to read a chapter of the Bible a day, and that they would see if what he was doing was right or wrong. He began to gain followers, but instead of declaring his new life a new religion, he claimed to be just trying to organize Rastas together and prepare them for repatriation.

Rastafarians had always used the Bible as the holy book of their faith, but not as intensively as this. Other Rastas use it for guidance, but Gad and his followers are using it to dictate their whole way of life. In fact, they believe that the way to salvation is through reading the Bible, a chapter a day, and recognizing Jesus Christ. Sounds pretty Christian, doesn't it? A whole new way of life was formed from the same history, the same holy book, only from a different perspective.

Gad was influenced by few religions, mainly Christianity, Christian Science, Theosophy, Unity, Judaism, and Rastafarianism. He left the EWF but organized the Twelve Tribes in similar terms, such as Executive Bench, collecting dues, "bodies" such as Sewing, Food, Music, etc.

Repatriation is the hopeful return of all Blacks to Africa, specifically Ethiopia, where Haile Selassie I was the king. Ethiopia became the term used to describe all of Africa. It is in line with the reuniting of the twelve lost tribes, as written in the scriptures. In 1949 the

Emperor granted the EWF lands at Malcoda, Shashamane, Ethiopia to aid in this much-anticipated homecoming. Gad told his followers that by being members of his Twelve Tribes that they were entitled to return to this place as well. There has been much fighting over this, and some members feel EWF is taking from Twelve Tribes of Israel when in actuality it is the other way around.

Today, groups of the Twelve Tribes exist all over the place:

"Well, at least we are organizing for a good while now, we have the organ, the 12 Tribes of Israel, in Jamaica, it start here, it is in Ethiopia, it is in the United States, it is in United Kingdom, Sweden, it is Germany, New Zealand, Tobago, Ghana, Australia, Kenya, and Grenada."

-Carrington

That is twelve places where they have organized. It seems that organization is the key word for these people, as organization is the way for them all to return to Ethiopia together. Truly their goals are to create happiness for themselves, while not necessarily bothering those around them, despite the conflict that they have caused with the EWF about Shashamane.

What is life like for a member of the Twelve Tribes? How does one become a member, anyway? What are their doctrines, their system of beliefs? Many people wonder about this, and information regarding them is pretty hard to find, because of the fact that the groups of Tribes in America mostly keep to themselves. They definitely don't come knocking on our doors every so often to try and convert people into being one of them. Instead they focus on the group that they have formed, working like dogs for their common goal: repatriation.

Here is a little bit about the doctrine of the Twelve Tribes as an organization:

Vernon Carrington, of course, is the leader of the entire body, being the prophet that he is. He doesn't do it all alone, though. He's got overseer-type "shepherds" that "watch over" tribes that are not in Gad's presence. There are 49 Executive Members who each hold a "seat on the bench." The 49 is comprised of 12 First brethren and 12 Second brethren, 12 First sistren and 12 Second sistren, and

Sister Dinah, who represents Dinah, daughter of Jacob. Altogether, they split into Twelve Tribes, each one standing for a Tribe of Israel, a month, a color, a body part, and an apostle of Jesus. <See chart >

<i>Tribe Name</i>	<i>Month of Birth</i>	<i>Tribe Color</i>	<i>Body Part</i>	<i>Tribe Function</i>	<i>Apostle</i>
Reuben	April	Silver	Eyes	Strength	Andrew
Simeon	May	Gold	Ears	Faith	Simon Pet
Levi	June	Purple	Nose	Will	Matthew
Judah	July	Brown	Mouth and Heart	Praise	Judas
Issachar	August	Yellow	Hands	Zeal	Thaddeus
Zebulon	September	Pink	Stomach	Order and Compassion	James Son Alpheus
Dan	October	Blue	Back	Judgement	James Son Zebedee
Gad	November	Red	Reproductive Organs	Power	Philip
Asher	December	Gray	Thighs	Understanding	Thomas
Naphtali	January	Green	Knees	Love	John
Joseph	February	White	Calves	Imagination	Bartholom
Benjamin	March	Black	Feet	Elimination	Simon the Zealot

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This is a table that Gad Man made up himself. Sometime after he realized that he was the incarnation of the Prophet, he had a vision that led to the formation of this table. It resembles astrology, with people being split up and assigned different tribes and attributes depending on whichever month they were born.

The reason why the number twelve comes up so often is a mystery. For some reason there are a few numbers that always seem to reoccur in the Bible. First is the number three. Three kings traveled from afar to celebrate Jesus' birth with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Thomas was asked three times if he doubted Jesus, and

three times he denied his holiness. The creative and destructive force of God is a trinity of a father, a son, and a Holy Spirit. There is also the number seven, as in the seven deadly sins, and the number twelve, of course. There are twelve apostles, twelve stations of the cross, twelve Tribes of Israel. It has not only an implication for posterity, but also has a genealogical, spiritual, and metaphysical significance. Perhaps the writers of the Bible were gamblers. Who knows? (God probably does) Numbers were always symbolic and events happening in any sort of series were common and creepily significant in the days of the Bible's birth.

If there is one flaw in the doctrine of the Twelve Tribes, it is God. In the Bible, God is described as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born unto a virgin mother, therefore without original sin. (Original sin was the act of Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit which caused their getting kicked out of Eden, and every baby conceived realistically is born with this sin in their hearts) Jesus, conceived by an angel of God and put into Mary, did not sin one time in his life. He was the Son of God, and therefore God Himself. It is written that he died on the cross at the hands of the Jews in order to save the sins of the Earth. It is also written that He will come again to the Earth and unite all people and sort of save us again. (We haven't been in exactly awesome shape since he died, anyway.) This is probably going to be at the end of time.

Haile Selassie was born on July 23, 1892 as Tafari Makonnen. He was given this title when he assumed the position of Emperor of Ethiopia. Members of the Twelve Tribes believe that he is "Christ in His Kingly Character", a phrase coined by C. I. Scofield in his Scofield Reference Bible which apparently contradicts the original Bible in a couple of ways, including this one. Haile Selassie can't be Christ because he was born with sin and continues to be just a regular guy. The only reason that they think he is Christ is because he claims to be of the descendancy of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheeba, giving him blood relation directly to the original Twelve Tribes. He is also a black king, finally a leader who is right with history (Israel and Jesus were "black") While these qualities make him a cool human being with a nice résumé, they still conflict with the scriptures. To take it a step further, Gad himself believes that Christ will reincarnate yet again and again, as long as there is an Emperor who is a descendant of Selassie:

"Well, His Majesty won't be the final king, cause he

is not here now, and we have other kings to come, right, so, as for me, I strongly believe, that the monarchy will establish, when, due time."

-Carrington

There are two main staples to their faith, the reading of the Bible and the greatness of Jesus Christ. When Gad Man had his first revelation, he began to read the Bible every day, and so the very first of the few dead-set rules is to read a chapter of the Bible daily, and that one must finish reading the whole Bible in three and a half years.

The second staple is Jesus Christ, the only way to salvation. The first thing you must do is realize that you are a sinner, and then you must realize that Jesus died to save all of our sins:

God's simple plan of salvation is: You are a sinner.

Therefore, unless you believe on Jesus Who died in your place, you will spend eternity in Hell. If you believe on Him as your crucified, buried, and risen Savior, you receive forgiveness for all of your sins and **His gift of eternal salvation by faith.**

For the fact that the two basic beliefs of the Twelve Tribes come straight from the Christian Bible, they are criticized extensively by other Rastas. The Whites, who enslaved the Africans, were Catholic and therefore their entire system of beliefs is said to be the root of all evil. There are two reasons that Twelve Tribes members aren't completely hated. All Rastas use the bible as their reference book, and the Tribes also point out the fact that they regard Jesus differently than Catholics do. They believe that there have been more incarnations of God, slightly diminishing the "quality" of Jesus (the classic comparison saying that more quantity probably equals less quality). Even this is not conducive to their own belief system, regarding Jesus in the highest. It's such a tiny difference that it's really hard to tell exactly what the difference is. From an interview with Gad himself:

The 12 Tribes of Israel is seen as closer to Christianity than other Rastafarian groups. Is there a basic difference in the doctrine?

"Yes there is a basic difference because we see

Christ, and that die and rose again, and that die for our sin, we see that person. So that is, you know, a different teaching, because is not many see this teaching, that Christ is the person."

He sounds pretty vague, doesn't he? Let's move on.

One of the most prominent aspects of the Rastafarian religion is the possession of dreadlocks. The idea comes from one of the original "commandments" of the Rastas: "Thou shall not take any sharp objects to thy face or head", basically meaning that you can't cut or comb your hair. Dreadlocks form when the hair would get matted down and tangled up by sleeping on it and living in the hot weather, the day-to-day wear and tear of the hair caused it to dread up into knots. The Jamaicans embraced this, as it was the opposite of the blonde, straight, neat hair as worn by the Whites that were oppressing them so.

The most heated of differences between Tribe members and other Rastas is based around this concept. There is not one set doctrine for most Rastas, "vintage Rastas", but dreadlocks and hate of the Whites is pretty much consistent. As Gad argues, there is no place in the Bible that says that you must dread your hair, and that Jesus Christ died for all of our sins, not just the sins of the Blacks. He doesn't even wear dreads himself. This is a pretty big deal in some Rasta communities. Plus, the Tribe of Benjamin Headquarters in New York City is led by a white American.

"We read in the Bible that out of one blood all nation, so it would be wrong for us to say only one race, we wouldn't survive that way, God make all of us, so, that is where I stand."

"There is not a hair doctrine. You see, by grace through Christ, so hair can't save you."

There is reading material besides the Scofield Reference Bible that is highly suggested to Twelve Tribes members. Among this material are the King James Bible, The Metaphysical Bible Dictionary, The Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey, and a work by a man named Herbert W. Armstrong. He wrote a book entitled "Mystery of the Ages" which pretty much takes all of the questions that one can think of to ask about why we are here, who is God, and so forth, and gives long-winded, Bible-quoting, negative, catastrophic

answers to them. Why did Carrington so highly suggest that followers read this material? Others have wondered this also, and their seeking of the answer has led them in circles.

One thing Vernon Carrington has said was that left was right and right was left, meaning the true meaning of things was twisted and reversed. In other words, what we know to be true is really a lie - good being evil and evil being good. Could this then be the reason we were instructed to read and study doctrines and books (Metaphysical Bible Dictionary, "Mystery of the Ages," etc) that the Bible expressly speaks against?

The funny thing is the guy who said this also said that he had asked Gad himself if he read the Bible and the answer had been no. But if you will refer to footnote IV on page 3 of this account, you will see Gad's own words saying that he read it at least twice. Who is lying? The doctrines, the followers, even the leaders of this organization seem to thrive in confusion and contradiction.

While they share with other Rastas the belief that the "holy weed " is central to the movement, yet another aspect is very different, and that is the event of monthly meetings. For a while shortly following their foundation, they held these meetings as soon as there were at least 49 Tribe members living in vicinity of each other (they meet weekly till 49 finally join), but the meetings have stopped for times and restarted again.

The meetings move locations, but are primarily held at what is called the "HQ," the place of centralization for the members of each house. They generally last a duration of 3-4 hours. Each one starts out with a prayer, which seems to be not much more than a long prayer that Catholics say at their religious services called the Apostle's creed with a little Rasta spice added to it. They all scream, "Jah Rastafari!" at the end of it. Then they sing a few hymns. Their songbook is called "Redemption songs: 1,000 Hymns and Choruses". Next is a session of Bible readings by a few brethren, called the Devotion. They always start with the same Bible reading, chapter 37 from the book of Ezekiel. Now people take turns Testifying, telling the whole place what they are thinking about God, although they are allowed to say other things as well. Then another song is sung, probably celebrating the conversation about House Mail and Finances, which is to follow. At the close of the meeting,

another Bible chapter is read, and "Blest Be the Ties That Bind" is sung. Everyone faces North and says the closing prayer and sings the anthem of the Ethiopian National Anthem. They shout in unison, "Jah Rastafari Selassie I!" once more and go home. It's easy to see why the meetings would stop after a short time, surely the Rastas might get bored of such an affair that is the same over and over.

One source said that salvation is based on virtue of membership to a Tribe. What determines your membership is your attendance at the meetings, and your paying of dues. Feel like becoming a member? The first step is acceptance by the Tribe members in town. They must have the power to not allow people that might pose anything but a positive vibe to the community. People aren't just allowed to join up, either. The house in your town must be at a time when they are accepting new members, which is also contradicting the Bible itself:

And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.

-Mark 16:15."

Meetings don't even preach the gospel at all. They just read any random passage of the Bible, whichever one seems to fit the day.

Once lucky enough to be allowed into the house, the new member is assigned the astrological-type tribe to which he now belongs depending upon what month he was born. Then he is required to "pay dues" and "do the work" or else he will be pretty much kicked out of the house.

The paying of the dues is simple and inexpensive. There is an entrance fee of \$2 and 20¢ is due each week. A separate get together is held weekly where refreshments are sold for fund-raising, but everyone has to put in their 20¢ whether or not they buy the food and drinks. There is music and dancing, with reggae artists who belong to the house providing entertainment. Bob Marley was a prominent member of the Twelve Tribes, and their favorite performer. He was their "chief singer and player of music," thereby he was enshrined in a biblical context.

Along with the dues nights, there are other fund raising events. People celebrate the month and tribe that their house represents, and sometimes they celebrate for no reason at all. All funds are sent

to Vernon Carrington. What does he do with all this money? He's rich these days. Sometimes the fund-raisers get pretty rowdy as some of the refreshments are alcoholic; they are more parties than anything else. This is a religious organization that parties all the time and really doesn't pay much attention to what they claim to be so devoted to.

Fortunately, they are civil to their women; the Twelve Tribes organization is used as an example of equal treatment of sexes and ages. They don't discriminate on the basis of race, age, or sex. Apparently, they don't really discriminate on the basis of religion, either, judging from the fact that all you have to do to be a member is to pay \$2. Is all this a ploy to be user-friendly so Vern can grab our money? At least it all sounds like fun.

It's time to move a little closer to home. There is a house of the Twelve Tribes of Israel in the Northeast Kingdom in Vermont. They mostly keep to themselves; they even home-school their children. A few years ago, there were allegations of them abusing their kids. A squadron of non-tribe members snuck in and took them all away! This was pretty much against the law, because there was no proof of this abuse, and so the children were returned safely home to their tribe. Just because they had a different way of doing things, people assumed the worst and wrongly intruded upon them. But they are very secretive about their beliefs and their lifestyles, anyway.

The only time they are more open is when a crowd of them jumps into a painted up school bus and travels around the country stopping at Phish concerts. Then they make and hand out fliers and try and lure wide-eyed kids into their bus so they can preach at them. They are mostly intimidating in these situations, especially when the "convertees" are under influences of psychedelics. Luckily, they are harmless.

In conclusion, that seems to be just what the Twelve Tribes of Israel organization is: harmless. They have their roots deeply imbedded in history, and they are true both to the religion they are modeled after and also to that which they claim to be an organization of. While their doctrines and beliefs often contradict each other and their practices seem to have nothing to do with either, their goals are pure (repatriation!) and fun (weekly reggae parties!). They are accepting and open, and not violent. They seem like an all right group of people, if you can get past their odd and confusing belief

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foundation.