

Investigating the Lemba Jews: Africa's lost tribe of Israel

After the death of Moses, the twelve tribes of Israel also known as the Hebrew, took possession of the Promised Land of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. The tribes were named after the sons or grandsons of Jacob, whose name was later changed to Israel, giving the Hebrew people the name, Israelites.

Jacob had twelve sons, Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Dan, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin. While there was no tribe named after Joseph, two tribes were named after his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and Levi's descendants were dispersed among the other tribes and received no tribal land of their own.

Following a dynasty dispute, the northern 10 tribes separated from Israel forming their own kingdom of Samaria, and later settled in northern Palestine. But in 740 BC they were taken into captivity by the Assyrians, and became known as the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

Although many of these Jews maintained their identity as a people, some others remained scattered throughout the world, with most of them oblivious of the fact that they are indeed descendants of Israel.

This lost tribe of Israel seem to have found their base somewhere in Africa, and are currently referred to as the Lemba tribe.

Now to the big question.

How are the Lemba people related to the Jewish people, and, could they really be the ten lost tribes of Israel?

Let's find out.

The Lemba regard themselves as Jews or Israelites who migrated southwards into Yemen and later as traders into Africa.

They are scattered all over South Africa, and have been discovered to be directly related to the Varembe in Zimbabwe and the Mwenye in Mozambique.

Most of the Lemba people are concentrated in the Limpopo Province, Mpumalanga, as well as the southern parts of Zimbabwe.

While this group of people share the same language with their neighboring tribes, and even look the same, they are unique in terms of their customs - customs which have quite a lot of similarities with that of the Jewish people.

Several researches have been conducted to understand the motives and beliefs behind Lemba customs and practices, and a lot of discoveries have been made through these findings.

Let's explore some of them.

The Lemba people share a lot of similarities with the Jewish, which further strengthens the claim that they may indeed be one and the same people.

Both the Lemba and the Jewish are Monotheistic, meaning that they both worship one God, whom the Lemba called Nwali and the Jewish refer to as Yaweh (the most high), and they both claim to be his chosen people.

Both tribes observe Shabbat, that is, Saturday being a day of rest. The Lemba also perform deep Jewish practices such as treating the new moon as Shabbat, male circumcision, not eating pork, and slaughtering animals in traditional Semitic style rather than African.

Likewise, in the past, both tribes carried a Holy Relic into battle, which was, for the Lemba, the ngoma lungundu, and for the Jewish, The Ark of the covenant.

One thing is clear.

Whoever the Lemba people are, they were not from the local African area, and their ancestors were people who engaged in deep religious practices which have been sustained through generations.

By comparing the story of the formation of the Lemba people and that of the Jewish, I have been able to find some key factors that suggest that this claim may be true.

First, according to the oral story of the Lemba people, their ancestors were Jews of the priest caste who left Judea 2500 years ago and settled in Yemen, and built a new city called Senna, located by the Indian Ocean Coastline.

After living conditions in Yemen grew worse, a part of these people migrated to Eastern-Africa. They settled in Ethiopia and became a part of the community through inter-marriages with the locals.

However, the story doesn't end there.

Some part of the migrated population further continued on their journey down south, settling in modern-day Tanzania and forming another tribe called the Senna II.

After the Senna II got destroyed, some parts of these migrants left for places like Kenya and Malawi, while the others traveled down to Mozambique and formed another tribe called the Senna III.

After several years, this group traveled further and settled in Zimbabwe where they became involved in the trade of precious metals and Jewels. Some of them even traveled further into South Africa, where they finally settled.... This is what we've heard.

However, while the Lemba tradition claims this to be their story, there is the need to verify these stories to be true, especially in terms of locations, where they came from, where they first arrived, the number of cities, as well as their ethnic groups.

Luckily, through several findings over the years, some proofs have sufficed.

Lemba claimed to have first settled in the ancient city of Senna, and interestingly, this city actually exists. Plus, it's still known by that exact same name. Although it is not a coastal city, it is linked to a port nearby, which gives more credibility to the Lemba story.

Yemen also did have a large Jewish population up until the modern era, which shows there was indeed some migration at some point. There are also quite some similarities between the Lemba Holy relic, ngoma lungundu, and the Ark of the Covenant, carried by the Hebrews.

However, while these similarities exist, carbon dating has shown that the ngoma lungundu is only about 700 years old, which does not correlate with the over 3000 years of the Ark of the Covenant. Plus, there are also no Ten Commandments found in it.

But here's something that might fascinate you.

The oral tradition of the Lemba people isn't the only thing that shows they are of Jewish heritage. Even their genetic composition supports this claim. In 1996, 49 Lemba men undertook a Y DNA genetic survey, the very first done in their tribe.

The results showed that about 50% of Lemba men had Y chromosomes that were similar to that of Semitic people of the Middle East, and in a concentration that's not seen in the genetics of people of their neighboring tribes. This further showed a strong link between the Lemba and the Jewish people.

Fortunately, after years of being dispersed from their original home, The Lemba people have started tracing their origin back to the land of the Hebrews.

Although there's currently no specific research to fully back up the Lemba's claim to Jewish heritage, a lot of findings have supported their migration story.

What are your thoughts on the Lemba migration story? Let me know in the comments section. Also don't forget to like this video if you found it insightful, and subscribe to the channel for more videos like this.