

A JUDE 3 PROJECT CURRICULUM

THROUGH EYES OF COLOR

A CONTEXTUALIZED GUIDE TO HELP YOU KNOW
WHAT YOU BELIEVE AND WHY.



JUDE 3 PROJECT

Chapter Five

ENGAGING BLACK CULTS

I. The Full Picture of Black Churches

In the last chapter, we marveled at a few of the contributions of black churches. However, there are two things about black churches we must keep in mind to ensure we have a full picture:

1. **Black churches aren't perfect.** One of Dr. Eddie Glaude's strongest arguments for the death of "the Black Church" is how it has shifted from a gospel centered around Christ and His sufferings to a gospel centered around prosperity. Though the prosperity gospel is not unique to black churches and is prevalent in churches of every ethnicity, unfortunately, many public figures in black churches are agents of this false doctrine.
2. **Black churches are part of the global family of God, and are specifically tied to the history of the American Church.** Dr. Jemar Tisby, president and co-founder of The Witness, states in his Jude 3 podcast interview that "There has never not been a time when racism wasn't part of American expressions of Christianity."⁵² Let that sink in for a minute. Tisby's use of the

52. Jemar Tisby, "The Truth About the American Church's Complicity in Racism" [Audio Podcast] Retrieved from <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/truth-about-american-churchs-complicity-in-racism-special/id978012810?i=1000428351443> (January 2019).

word “never” is not some emotional exaggeration—it’s a historical fact. In his book, *The Color of Compromise*, Tisby “takes readers on a historical journey from America’s early colonial days, through slavery and the Civil War, the tragedy of Jim Crow laws, the struggles of the Civil Rights Era, up to today’s Black Lives Matter Movement.”⁵³ All along the way, the American church has unfortunately either been at the forefront of the creation and execution of these national evils, or at the forefront of standing in opposition to movements promoting civil rights.

As much as we might want to divorce ourselves from these two realities, we are wedded to them both through their leaders’ and followers’ professions of faith in Jesus Christ. Now we can debate all day the legitimacy of their salvation, but that’s way over our pay grades. There is only one Judge, and He will judge the guilty with all righteousness and truth (Psalms 96:13). We, on the other hand, have been tasked with calling those who are far from God to plunge their sins beneath the flood of blood that was drawn from Immanuel’s veins. But this task is difficult given the church’s historical baggage.

Before we can even get to a conversation about the gospel, we may first be required to answer questions like, “If God is so good, why did He allow black people to suffer so horrendously?” or “If God is so powerful and just, why didn’t He intervene and punish our oppressors for their sins?” Scholars refer to these seemingly “hard to answer questions” as the Problem of Evil. “The problem of evil is the question of how to reconcile the existence of evil with an omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient God.”⁵⁴ The question goes, “If God is all-powerful, all-loving, and all-knowing, why do bad things happen?”

During our HBCU Tour, Lisa Fields, the founder and president of the Jude 3 Project, encountered two Hebrew Israelites at Southern University, who had come with the intention of challenging her views in a public setting. After passionately presenting their opposing view, one of the men yelled out with tears in his eyes, “Why are black people suffering like this?!” This man’s cry echoes the cries of the psalmist in Psalm 22, who also felt abandoned by God. He writes,

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why are you so far away when I groan for help?

53. Jemar Tisby, *Color of Compromise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), bill.

54. The Problem of Evil, Retrieved July 5, 2019 from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_of_evil

Every day I call to you, my God, but you do not answer.

Every night I lift my voice, but I find no relief.

Though on the surface Hebrew Israelites can appear to be just obnoxiously and aggressively shouting out obscene comments from street corners, underneath all of that vibrato is a deep sense of pain, confusion, and abandonment they long explain.

Brothers and sisters, we cannot assume that if we walk up to someone and offer them God’s plan of salvation that they will just readily say, “yes!” Instead, we need to be prepared to empathize with their pain and engage their hard questions. We need to be ready to provide an apology—a reasonable argument—for how we have come to accept a religious belief that has historically been used as a tool of oppression.

How do you think someone wrestling with the problem of evil might respond to the prosperity gospel?

How would you respond to the Hebrew Israelites question, “Why are black people suffering like this?”

In general, how do you respond to friends and loved ones when they say they have turned away from the church because of its false doctrines and evil history?

II. Addressing the Problem of Evil

It's unfortunate that the message meant to give us hope in the midst of suffering has brought about sense of hopelessness for some because of its misuse. Instead of solving the problem of evil, because of its connection with the works of slavery and the institutionalization of racism, it has added more fuel to the fire and caused people to question the very character and existence of God. However, these questions are the result of a failure to get acquainted with Christianity beyond its American roots, remember that this is the same message faith that empowered the Civil Rights Movement, and carefully reflect on the gospel.

For many of us, when we think of the gospel, we only consider the cross. This makes sense given that the gospel Paul sought to pass on to the church at Corinth was that Christ had died, was buried, and had risen from the dead according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3). However, we must remember that the cross fits within the context of a story in which God created a perfect world, then, that perfect world sinned against Him and thus became imperfect, and that through Christ's first and second coming God is and will make His world perfect again for all who confess Christ as Lord. Bad things don't happen because something is awry with God. He created the world and it was very good. Bad things happen because something is awry with humanity. When Adam and Eve sinned against God, self-centeredness, self-preservation, corruption, and every kind of wickedness along with death entered the world. God is not the one to fault or question for the brokenness of this world. Instead, we need to live in awareness of that this world is pervasively broken because of sin. The Bible says not one of us are righteous and that all of us have turned away from God (Romans 3:10). It also refers to us as inventors of evil whose feet are swift to shed blood (Romans 1:30, 3:15). So yes, we cry out with the Hebrew Israelite about the sufferings of black folks in America. It's appropriate. However, this is the bad news that has prepared our hearts to receive the Good News of Jesus Christ!

The Good News of Jesus Christ is that the all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing, and forever wise God intervened on the behalf of humanity to rescue them from their sin and its effects by sending His one and only son, Jesus Christ, into the world to not only die for our sins, but to also sympathize with our suffering in every way (John 3:16, Hebrews 4:15). For all who trust in Him, though they will still experience trouble in this life, they can trust that in all things God is working for the good of those who love him and are called according to His purpose as they await for Christ to return and establish His kingdom (Romans 3:23-26, 8:28-30). In this new kingdom, there will be no more suffering, no more tears, no more injustice, no more grief over

the pain and injustice many have experienced in this broken world (Revelation 21:4). Our all-powerful, all-loving, all-knowing, and forever wise God will wipe it all away and we will dwell in His presence day after day after day after day...

Group Activity: Spend some time in prayer together by: (1) Lamenting before the Lord about past and present injustices that have taken place in America; (2) Asking God that He would draw the hearts of those who have come to distrust Him and Christianity because of these past and present injustices to Himself.

III. Black Cults

At the 2019 Legacy Conference, as a part of the Jude 3 Apologetic's Track, Pastor Cam Triggs lead a seminar called "Black Suffering and the Problem of Evil." In addition to pointing out how many people have turned away from Christianity because of black suffering, and how it causes people to questions related to the problem, Triggs helped the audience see that many have turned to black cults because it offers them: (1) **An identity** that is either outside of the narrative of slavery and/or one that is superior to their white counterparts; (2) **A destiny** in which they are liberated from their suffering and their oppressors undergo the judgement they believe they are due.

Now, when we say "black cults," we're not talking about the charismatic movement of Jim Jones in which he convinced more than 900 people to commit suicide via a concoction of Kool-Aid, cyanide, and other deadly substances. We're talking about a group of individuals who have constructed a set of beliefs that deviate from a major religion's orthodox beliefs. For example, the Nation of Islam deviates from orthodox Islam, while the teachings of Hebrew Israelites deviate from orthodox Judaism.

Below, you will find a chart that gives a brief overview of some of the deviations and ideologies African-Americans have come to embrace in order to establish a greater sense of their identity and destiny.



Origins

The Nation of Islam was founded in 1930 by Wallace D. Fard, whom NOI followers refer to as “the Master” and believed to be the second coming of Jesus Christ. “His mission was to teach the downtrodden and defenseless Black people a thorough Knowledge of God and of themselves, and to put them on the road to Self-Independence with a superior culture and higher civilization than they had previously experienced.”¹

The honorable Elijah Muhammed was his successor and led the movement from 1934–1975. It is a sect within the Muslim faith.



Common Reasons for Rejecting Christianity

American Christianity’s association with slavery, racism, and structures of oppression. They believe Christianity is like a whip in a white man’s hand to keep the black man in check because of passages like, “slaves obey your masters” or “submit to governing authorities” because they have been placed there by God (Col. 3:22; Rom. 13:1–2).



Sacred and/or Important Text

They believe in the Quran and the truth of the Bible but believe “it has been tampered with and must be reinterpreted so that mankind will not be snared by the falsehoods that have been added to it.”² When they say they believe in the truth of the Bible, they are not saying they believe the Bible is factually true. Instead, they are saying they believe the Bible has truth, in a general sense, to offer.

Elijah Muhammad’s book, *A Message to the Blackman in America*, can be likened to a systematic theology book that lays out the primary beliefs of the Nation of Islam on God, humanity, salvation, the afterlife, and justice.



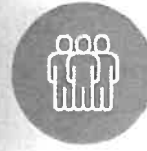
Doctrine of God

1. They believe that God, who they refer to as Allah, is a black man. They believe Fard was Allah in physical form.³
2. They deny the deity of Christ and the triune nature of God as Father, Son, and Spirit. They believe that Jesus was historically a Muslim and not Jewish.

1. Tynetta Muhammad, Brief History of the Origin of the Nation of Islam, Retrieved July 5th, 2019 from <https://www.noi.org/noi-history/>

2. Elijah Muhammad, *Message to the Blackman in America* (Irving, TX: Secretarius MEMPS Publication, 1965 and 1975) 163.

3. Ibid, 5.



Doctrine of Humanity

1. They believe black people are superior to all other ethnicities, particularly the white race, because the black man was the original man and all other races were created from him.⁴
2. They believe the white man is the devil.⁵
3. They believe in justice and equality for all humans regardless of their ethnicity.⁶



Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)

They believe black people are the fulfillment of God’s promise to deliver Abraham’s people from slavery.⁷

They believe black people are “the people of God’s choicc, as it has been written, that God would choose the rejected and the despised,” and that they will receive the resurrection of the righteous because of their ethnicity and their suffering.⁸



Doctrine of the After Life

They believe in the mental—not the physical—resurrection of the dead, and believe that because they are the most in need of a mental resurrection, black people will be resurrected first.

They believe that Jesus was a Muslim and not a Jew, and that in the final judgement the white race and Christianity will be destroyed.⁹



Doctrine of Justice

They believe in justice and equality for all humans regardless of their ethnicity.¹⁰

4. Ibid, 52.

5. Ibid, 241.

6. What Muslims Want, Retrieved July 5, 2019 from <https://www.noi.org/muslim-program/>

7. Tynetta Muhammad, Brief History of the Origin of the Nation of Islam, Retrieved July 5th, 2019 from <https://www.noi.org/noi-history/>

8. Ibid.

9. Muhammad, 22.

10. What Muslims Want, Retrieved July 5, 2019 from <https://www.noi.org/muslim-program/>



Origins

The Hebrew Israelites trace their origins back to the Pre-Civil War Era. Their primary leaders were Frank Cherry and William Saunders Crowdy, who both believed they were commissioned as prophets by God to reveal to black people that they were the true descendants of the Hebrews spoke of in the Bible.¹ There are currently a variety of different branches of Hebrew Israelites across the country.



Common Reasons for Rejecting Christianity

Some have likened today's rise of Hebrew Israelites to that of the Nation of Islam during the Civil Rights movement, given that both of these groups are passionate about addressing the horrors of racism in America.² However, Hebrew Israelites don't outright reject Christianity. Instead, they have reshaped the narrative of Scripture in a way that lifts up their blackness and suffering as "the way" to God and excludes those who are not black or who haven't shared in the suffering of black folks from accessing eternal life.



Sacred and/or Important Text

Many believe that the King James Version of the Bible is the only authentic version, while also affirming the Apocrypha.



Doctrine of God

1. They believe God's true name is *Yah*, and that in order to be saved a person must call on the true name of Jesus in Hebrew, which is *Yahshuah Ben Yah*.
2. Many adherents reject the triune nature of God, that God is the only Supreme Being, and that Jesus was just a man.³

1. J. David Bleich, *Black Jews: A Halakhic Perspective*, Retrieved July 12, 2019 from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23258489>

2. Jamal Hopkins, "Hebrew Israelites, KJV, & Black Identity" [Audio Podcast] Retrieved from <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/jude-3-project/id978012810?i=1000430326874> (January 2019)

3. Joe Carter, *9 Things You Should Know About Black Hebrew Israelites*, Retrieved July 12, 2019 from <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-black-hebrew-israelites/>



Doctrine of Humanity

They believe "Black people are the true Israelites from the tribe of Judah" and this truth was lost as a result of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.⁴



Doctrine of Salvation (Soteriology)

"The Black Hebrew Israelites typically believe that the Trans-Atlantic slave trade is a biblical prophecy fulfilled in our American context."⁵



Doctrine of the After Life

Many do not believe in a literal hell, but instead view the present as the white man's heaven and the black man's hell. When Jesus returns, he will gather all of Israel (black people) back to the Promised Land.⁶

4. Ryan Turner, *Black Hebrew Israelites*, Retrieved July 20, 2019 from https://carm.org/black-hebrew-israelites#footnote4_z4rqeh3

5. Cam Triggs, *10 Things to Study Before Engaging Hebrew Israelites*, Retrieved July 15, 2019 from <http://www.jude3project.com/blog/10thingstostudybhi>

6. Ryan Turner, *Black Hebrew Israelites*, Retrieved July 20, 2019 from https://carm.org/black-hebrew-israelites#footnote4_z4rqeh3



Origins

Kemeticism was revived in the late 1980s by Rev. Tamara L. Siuda, who kemets refer to as Hemet (an ancient Egyptian word translated either as “majesty” or “sacred incarnation”). It’s important to note, due to its peculiarity, that Rev. Siuda is a white woman. The kemets believe she was hand-picked by the Netjer (their supreme diety) to “revive Kemet’s long-forgotten ways . . . to a modern world sorely in need of it.”¹



Common Reasons for Rejecting Christianity

Believe that Christianity is an appropriation of Egyptian religions, and that it has stolen the religious legacy of people of African descent. This idea of appropriation is ever so appealing to people of African descent, given the plethora of modern examples in which white people have used certain elements of black culture for profit (i.e., Hip Hop, cornrows, big hips and lips).



Sacred and/or Important Text

There is no sacred text associated with Kemeticism. Instead they believe in a “fluid understanding of balance, truth, and justice.”

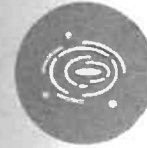


Doctrine of God

Kemeticism is polytheistic, which means they believe in many gods and goddesses. However, they do believe these deities can work together as one divine source, whom they refer to as Netjer.²

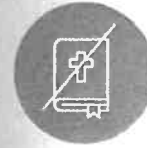
1. Rev. Tamara Siuda, Retrieved July 20, 2019 from <http://www.kemet.org/nisut-biography>

2. What is Kemetic Othodoxy?, Retrieved July 20, 2019 from <http://www.kemet.org/about>



Origins

The ideals of Pan-Africanism were formed in the 1850s and grew into a social and political movement that sought to reconnect African-Americans with their African roots. Though these ideals were constructed by several individuals, W. E. B. DuBois has been named the father of Pan-Africanism.³ Today, Dr. Umar Johnson is one of the main figures of Pan-Africanism, and is affectionately referred to as “Popa” — “the prince of Pan-Africanism.”⁴



Common Reasons for Rejecting Christianity

Pan-Africanism isn’t so much of a rejection of Christianity, but a celebration of everything black! It is possible for a person to be both a Christian and someone who hold to ideals of Pan-Africanism. The danger is when these ideals are presented either apart from or in elevation over a biblical worldview. Several people are drawn to this ideology because it deeply affirms their blackness in a world that rarely does. If anything they would reject Christianity because historically it has demeaned, devalued, abused, and misinterpreted blackness.

Where do you see the themes of identity and destiny throughout these religions and ideologies?

What kind of identity and destiny is offered to us in the gospel?

3. Peter Kuryla, Pan-Africanism, Retrieved July 15, 2019 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-Africanism>

4. Jerome Gay, “The Theology of Umar Johnson” [Audio Podcast] Retrieved from <https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-fr752-64a238> (November 2016).



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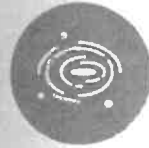


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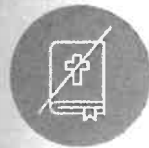
1. Rev. Tamara Siuda, Retrieved July 20, 2019 from <http://www.kemet.org/nisut-biography>

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3. Peter Kuryla, Pan-Africanism, Retrieved July 15, 2019 from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Pan-Africanism>

4. Jerome Gay, “The Theology of Umar Johnson” [Audio Podcast] Retrieved from <https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-fr752-64a238> (November 2016).

Where are some places that you find common ground with these religions and ideologies?

What about these religions and ideologies do you find disturbing?

There is so much more that can be said and explored about each of these rising streams of thought. And because we live in an age of relativism, many who adhere to one of these ideologies may express their beliefs and practices differently from others professing the same ideals. Some will even take a little from one ideology and a little from another to create their own “unique” line of thought. Scholars refer to this practice as syncretism. So don’t be surprised if you run into a person who claims to “just be spiritual and not religious” but believes black people are the original people of God and the white man is the devil, prays five times a day, attends a Christian church, and prays to his or her ancestors for wisdom. Also, be careful not to judge a person like this too quickly without getting a fuller picture of what they believe and why they believe it.

III. Principles for Engaging Black Cults

1. BE SLOW TO SPEAK AND QUICK TO LISTEN

It is very easy for us as Christians to position ourselves as those who have all the answers. It’s also easy for us to get easily offended when someone says something negative or heretical about our faith. Listen, we understand the urge to want to put tape over the mouths of the men standing on street corners with bowties or cultic paraphernalia and the impulse to beat their heads over and over again with a Bible. But brothers and sisters, this is not the way. We need to be slow to speak and quick to listen (James 1:19) in hopes of getting an understanding of what they believe and why they believe it. As we slow down and listen, we get a sense of their worldview. A worldview is a set of beliefs that helps a person to make sense of the world and serves

as a guide for how they will live in it. Once we have a better sense of their worldview, then we can speak directly to the concerns and beliefs they hold dear.

2. ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

Asking good questions is an important part of being slow to speak and quick to listen. Asking good questions not only gives you an opportunity to learn more about the person’s worldview, but also helps you guide the conversation and keep it on track in case they go off on a tangent. Here are examples of good questions you can ask:

How did you come to accept the beliefs of _____?

What do you find appealing about _____?

How have you come to know that what you believe is true?

Anytime you sense a contradiction exist within their line of thought, question it by asking: “Earlier you said, ‘_____,’ but just now you said, ‘_____’.” How do you hold these two things in tension one another?”

What are some other good questions?

3. FIND COMMON GROUND

You may have noticed that some of what burdens and concerns those affiliated with black cults isn’t far from things that burden and concern Christians. We share their disgust for the ways Christianity and the Bible was used to justify the enslavement of black people. We, too, believe in justice and equality for all. We affirm that black is beautiful, because it was created in the image of God. These are places where we can find common ground. It is in these places of common ground that we can affirm their concerns, then share how we make sense of it and respond to it through the lens of a Christian worldview.

4. KNOW WHAT YOU BELIEVE

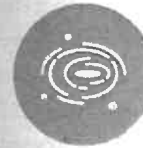
In his podcast interview, “KJV, Hebrew Israelites, and Black Identity,” Dr. Jamal

Hopkins points out that in order for a Christian to dispel the myths and misunderstandings of black cults, he or she must understand “what they believe and why they believe it.”⁵⁵ This will require them to not just read the Word daily, but to study the Word in its ancient Middle-Eastern historical and cultural context. This becomes particularly significant when we are engaging with Hebrew Israelites, who use the Bible to promote and defend the majority of their claims.

Brothers and sisters, the work of knowing what you believe and why you believe it is part of your role as an ambassador for Christ (2 Corinthians 5:20). An ambassador not only accepts the decree of his or her king, but they are also intimately acquainted with King and His commands so they can intelligently share His decrees with others. Yes, this is hard work. But how else are we to plead on Christ’s behalf with those caught up in false doctrines to be reconciled to God—the God who fearfully and wonderfully made them in his image; the God who never intended for them to experience the injustice of racism but created them to live in a world that was filled with perfect harmony and peace?

On the next page is a chart with a brief history of Christianity along with an overview of its primary beliefs:

55. Jamal Hopkins, “Hebrew Israelites, KJV, & Black Identity” [Audio Podcast] Retrieved from <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/jude-3-project/id978012810?i=1000430326874> (January 2019).



Origins

Christianity, which was originally referred to as “The Way,” was founded by Jesus Christ between 1–4 B.C (Acts 9:2, 19:9). Jesus was a descendent of David according to the flesh, and was proclaimed to be the Son of God through His resurrection from the dead (Rom. 1:1–3). It can even be argued that Christianity started centuries prior to Jesus’ resurrection given that Jesus was the fulfillment of God’s promise to Adam and Eve that they would have a descendent, who would crush the head of their enemy, death and God’s promise to Abraham to bless all the nations through his descendants.

1. We believe in God the Father, who is the creator of heaven and earth and Lord over all creation.
2. We believe God the Son, Jesus Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, was both fully human and divine. We believe in His substitutionary death for all of those who would put their trust in His sacrifice on the cross for their salvation. We believe in His bodily resurrection and expect Him to return to execute justice.
3. We believe that Jesus is the only way to God based on His profession that He alone is the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one will come to the Father except through Him.
4. We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who was present at creation, participated in the resurrection, and now lives in God’s people, enabling them to live the Christian life and proclaim the good news to those far from Him.
5. We believe that the Old and New Testaments together are the inspired Word of God, that it is infallible in matter of life and practice, and inerrant in its original form.
6. We believe Jesus died for the sins of the whole world, not a particular ethnic group.
7. We believe in a heaven and hell, and that those who put their faith in Jesus Christ prior to their death or His second coming will experience eternal life with Christ in heaven forever, while those who don’t will spend eternity in hell apart from God.
8. We believe God has commissioned every believer to be an ambassador for Him and has empowered each of them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the uttermost parts of the world.



Primary Beliefs

5. KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE IT

After you have plainly stated what you believe to someone who has a different world-view than you, be prepared to give a reason for why you believe it. Many Christians skip this part and simply respond to questions concerning why they believe what they believe with “I believe it because the Bible tells me so.” This is no better than when you asked your parents why you can’t chew gum in church and they simply responded, “Because I said so.” It’s not a satisfying answer. We have to remember that in most cases people have been constructing their beliefs in whatever religion they subscribe to over a period of time. You can’t expect to just swoop in and convince them that Jesus is the only way. You’ve got to be prepared to give a reasonable defense for why you hold to your beliefs. Here are a few questions you need to be prepared to answer:

- Why do you believe that the Bible is true?
- Why do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead?
- Why do you believe that Jesus is not merely a man, but both human and divine?
- Why don’t you believe that black people are the chosen people of God?
- Why don’t you believe that the white man is the devil?
- Why do you believe that salvation is for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ?
- Why do you think that Christianity and the Bible affirm blackness?

Group Activity: If you are in a group, practice with each other how you might answer some of these questions. At the end of each person’s turn, give one another feedback on what the person did well and where they can improve. Hold each other accountable to doing the hard work of learning how to provide answers to each of these questions.

6. CONTEND FOR THE FAITH

One of the Hebrew Israelites’ foundational passages of Scripture is Deuteronomy 28. When they read Deuteronomy 28 they find an answer to the Hebrew Israelites question, “Why are black people suffering like this?”

On a Hebrew Israelite website, deuteronomy28.org, at the top of their home page it reads, “YAH (God) said that He would curse Israel for their disobedience and those curses would be used as a sign to identify who the true children of Israel are!”

As a group read Deuteronomy 28 and discuss the following questions:

In what ways are the Hebrew Israelites drawing parallels between the curses presented in Deuteronomy 28 and black suffering?

What do you find problematic about their interpretation of this passage of Scripture?

In the first chapter of this book, we answered the question, “What is Hermeneutics?” What we decided to hold off telling you about until this very opportune time is that there are two common hermeneutical processes: exegesis and eisegesis. Exegesis is the process by which the reader studies a passage of scripture with the intention of drawing out the author’s intended meaning in light of the author’s historical and cultural context. Eisegesis, on the other hand, is the process by which the reader imposes their interpretation and 21st century context onto the text. For example, many people claim the promise God made to the children of Israel in Jeremiah 29:11 for themselves. Now, I’m not saying that the Lord doesn’t have a plan for your life or that He doesn’t want you to prosper, but that promise was not made to you. That’s eisegesis. That promise was made to the people of Israel when they were defeated and taken captive by the Babylonians. Imagine their confusion. Here they are the very people of God and they have been removed from the very land that God promised them. Then God tells them that He is actually the one who has brought this judgment on them in order for them to repeat. And though they might understand that there are consequences for their sins, they now find themselves captives to some of the biggest idolaters in the known world. It’s into this confusion that God speaks these words to Israel, “I know the plans that I have for you...they are plans for good and not disaster, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

This is the same thing that the Hebrew Israelites are doing when they say, “Since the

curses in Deuteronomy are closely related to the experiences we had during slavery, it must be talking about us.” However, if you keep reading through the Old Testament you will see that Israel bore the consequences of their sins when they were exiled from their homeland and taken as captives by the Babylonian Empire. Remember Daniel? Daniel was a slave as a fulfillment of these curses. All throughout the book of Lamentations the writer records his grieve over how the very things that God said would happen, happened.

“Judah has been led away into captivity,
oppressed with cruel slavery.
She lives among foreign nations
and has no place to rest” (Lamentations 1:3).

“The Lord is just,
for I have rebelled against his commands.
Listen, all you people;
look at my pain.
my young women and young men
have gone into captivity” (Lamentations 1:18).

“Lord, look and consider
To whom you have done this.
Should women eat their own children,
The infants they have nurtured” (Lamentations 2:20)?

Though the writer of Lamentations shares the same confusion as the Hebrew Israelites over the state of his people, he doesn’t share his ethnicity. And here’s the beauty of it: He doesn’t have to in order to be fully assured that God sees him, loves him, and will rescue him for his sins.

“In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:9-10, ESV)

That big word, “propitiation,” means that Christ satisfied the wrath of God against our sins through His life, death, and resurrection. If this is true, then this means that God has no more curses to deal out because of sin. Instead, all of God’s beef with humanity was squashed at the cross. We can trust that Jesus’ sacrifice was sufficient for

all of us because in raising from the dead, he conquered our greatest enemy, death! This is the gospel! This is our hope! Let us follow the apostle Peter’s instruction and revel in the beauty of the gospel for our own soul’s sake so that we will be ready to give a defense with gentleness and respect to all who would ask us to give a reason for the hope we have within (1 Peter 3:13-17).

Challenge: Sign up to the Old Testament Bible Reading Plan on our Jude 3 Project Bible Reading App as a way to get familiar with the story of God. This step alone will serve you greatly in your ability to contend for the faith against heresy.

IV. Tools for Going Deeper

- Jemar Tisby, *Color of Compromise* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019).
- Rahaan A. Armand and Tyrann T. Laws, *The Round Table: A Christian’s Conversation with Marginal Beliefs Affecting the Black Church Experience* (USA: Xulon Press).