

Who and Where Are the House of Israel?

Over the decades there has been confusion as to which nationalities stem from the House of Israel. Typically, the lands providing the most converts have been declared to be of Israel. Since baptismal rates vary over time, there has been much confusion, as these statements indicate:

1. Possibly in Tibet? An article in the *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 1, 1844 noted: "There were a number of the house of Israel discovered in little Thibet [sic] in the interior of China, in a highly civilized state, a few years ago. Whither these were the branches referred to or not, is not for us at present to say;—certainly it is, however, that they do exist some where; according to the accounts given both in the Bible and the Book of Mormon, — there are some of the house of Israel living on the islands of the sea." (*Times and Seasons*, Vol. 5, No. 3, Feb. 1, 1844, p. 426.)
2. Not Much Blood of Israel in Latin America or Asia. Andrew Jenson told a crowd at the April 1913 general conference: "When we have turned our attention to Latin or Oriental countries, we have met with but little success. If we have successfully preached the gospel in Australia, it is perhaps because the people there are mainly of English origin, and the same can be said of New Zealand, as to the white population. And if we speak of the Hawaiians and the Samoans and the Maoris, then they are simply another branch of the House of Israel, and that is undoubtedly the reason why we have met with success among them. Study the history of our mission-ary career ever since the Church was organized and I will venture to say that we hitherto have made very little progress among any people except those who come, as we claim, either pure or mixed from the House of Israel. We have not had success among the Latin or Oriental races, or among the Chinese or Japanese. There may be some of the blood of Israel among them, but so far we have discovered but a very little. Then I say, let us study this matter intelligently, when we endeavor to trace our genealogy and seek to complete the chain connecting us with Father Abraham." (Andrew Jenson, *Conference Report*, April 1913, p. 81.)
3. Little in Mexico. In 1884, Apostle Francis M. Lyman told a priesthood meeting that he "considered that the blood of Cain was more predominant in these Mexicans than that of Israel." (D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*, 1997, p. 783.)
4. Only Anglo-Saxons. "Ephraimites are the Anglo-Saxon race." (Archibald F. Bennett, "The Children of Ephraim," *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine*, 21 [1930], p. 67.)
5. Abraham's Seed Are Those From Better Grades of Nations. "Our place among the tribes and nations evidently was assigned to us by the Lord. That there was an assignment of this kind before earth life began is a declaration of the scriptures. Certain spirits were chosen to come through the lineage of Abraham, and this choice was made in the beginning. Other selections were also made and the nations determined upon by the councils in the heavens. . . . Is it not a reasonable belief that the Lord would select the choice spirits to come to the better grades of nations? Is it not reasonable to believe that less worthy spirits would come through less favored lineage? Does this not account in very large part for the various grades of color and degrees of intelligence we find in the earth?" (Joseph Fielding Smith, *The Way to Perfection*, 1931, 1943, pp. 46, 48.)
6. Not in Brazil. "W. Grant Bangerter described his mission to Brazil in the early 1940s in just this way: "We thought that the blood of Israel meant blond, European people, and that we wouldn't expect too much success among Latin peoples because they probably didn't have the proper lineage. So under these conditions we weren't too serious about the great overall purpose of missionary work in the Church. And according to our vision, so was our success. We had very little of either.'" (W. Grant Bangerter, Oral History; cited in *Dialogue*, Summer 2005, p. 82.)
7. Not in Southern Europe. "B. H. Roberts . . . noted that 'our mission has had little success among the Latin races of southern Europe,' but also cited missionary success in northern Europe as evidence that the tribe of Ephraim 'from the British Isles, from Germany, from the Scandinavian countries, . . . [is] gathered by the

gospel message.” (B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*; cited in Armand L. Mauss, “In Search of Ephraim, *Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 1999, p. 158.)

8. Those Born in the United States. “Is there reason then why the type of birth we receive in this life is not a reflection of our worthiness or lack of it in the pre-existence life? . . . can we account in any other way for the birth of some of the children of God in darkest Africa, or in flood-ridden China or among the starving hordes of India, while some of the rest of us are born here in the United States? We cannot escape the conclusion that because of performance in our pre-existence some of us are born as Chinese, some as Japanese, some as Indians, some as Negroes, some as Americans, some as Latter-day Saints. These are rewards and punishments, fully in harmony with His established policy in dealing with sinners and saints, rewarding all according to their deeds.” (Mark E. Petersen, Address to Institute Teachers, BYU, Aug. 27, 1954.)

9. Super-Abundance of Blood of Israel in Central America. President Harold B. Lee, at the area general conference in Mexico City on Aug. 25, 1972, said: “The evidence of the hastening of which the Lord spoke can be found in no greater measure than in this land of Mexico and in the countries of Central America as witnessed by the overwhelming super-abundance of the blood of Israel to be found here.” (Heidi S. Swinton, *In the Company of Prophets: Personal Experiences of D. Arthur Haycock*, 1993, p. 75.)

10. Asians Are of House of Israel. “Those people who have been given patriarchal blessings from Korea and elsewhere have been told by the spirit of inspiration that they are of the house of Israel. There isn't any question at all about that. This means that in their veins flows the same blood that flows in our veins. It's not just the single fact that God has made of one blood all nations of men, that they should dwell on all the face of the earth. It is the fact that the house of Israel, the choicest and most select and favored blood of the earth, has been spread everywhere. And we're getting that blood into the Church in Korea and in Asia, and I'm sure we'll find it in all the untouched nations of the earth as rapidly as we get into them.” (Bruce R. McConkie, quoted in Spencer Palmer, *The Expanding Church*, 1978, p. 145.)

11. Little Blood of Israel in Many European Catholic Areas. In 1948, when the Genealogical Society was trying to decide where to concentrate its microfilming efforts, Elder Joseph Fielding Smith “was convinced that the Church need not be as much concerned with countries such as Ireland, France, Spain and Italy as with other European countries, for he did not think there were as many descendants of Israel in those countries.” (James B. Allen, Jessie L. Embry, and Kahlile B. Mehr, *Hearts Turned to the Fathers*, 1995, p. 262.)

12. Blacks Certainly Not House of Israel. “As a result of his rebellion, Cain was cursed with a dark skin; he became the father of the Negroes, and those spirits who are not worthy to receive the priesthood are born through his lineage.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, page 102.)

13. African Blacks Are of House of Israel and Are Worthy. In August, 1996, Elder J. Richard Clarke of the Seventy created the first branch of the Church in Angola, in the capital city of Luanda. Some 80 members, all black, were in attendance, part of some 400 members in Angola. Elder Clarke noted, “The blood of Israel is strong there. They are a believing people. I'm sure the Lord will prepare for an abundant harvest.” (*Church News*, Sep. 7, 1996, p. 7.)

a. By Adoption. Elias Vis, a black member in South Africa, wrote: “In my patriarchal blessing I am told that I will be a bridge for my people to come to the gospel. I was happy to learn that I am a descendant of Ephraim by adoption.” (E. Dale LeBaron, *All Are Alike Unto God*, 1990, p. 195.)

b. By Birthright. Another South African black, Ella Volenhoven, said, “I am also grateful to be of the tribe of Ephraim.” (*Ibid.*, p. 209.)

14. Lineage Has Been Seen Differently. After surveying over 700 patriarchal blessings, 560 of them from the nineteenth century, Irene Bates reported: "Latter-day Saints believe they will receive the promised blessings through a specific tribe. Declarations of tribal lineage in patriarchal blessings have been seen variously over time as designating: (1) literal blood relationships, (2) transformations of the blood, (3) adoptions into certain tribes, (4) simply the tribe through which one may expect future blessings." (Irene Bates, "Patriarchal Blessings: The Transformation of Charisma." *Dialogue*, Fall 1993, p. 3.)

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15. Both Israelite and Gentile? "Is it possible for the same person to be an Israelite by birth and yet be considered a Gentile? Although Pres. Young identified Joseph Smith as a 'pure Ephraimite' . . . so far as the Prophet's family or blood lines were concerned, Brigham Young and others have recognized that (1) Joseph Smith was from a Gentile nation, and (2) some of his progenitors may have come from bloodlines other than that of Ephraim."

16. Different Tribes Possible in Same Family "It is reasonable to understand that we one and all have come through a mixed relationship, and that the blood of Ephraim and also of Manasseh could be in the veins of many of us, likewise the blood of others of the twelve tribes of Israel, and that none of us had come through the ages with clear exclusive descent from father to son through any one of the tribes. In giving blessings the patriarch then is directing the lineage through the blood that predominates, and there could be one son who would be designated as of Ephraim and his brother, of the same father and mother, could correctly be said to be of the blood of Manasseh, or of Benjamin, or of any other member of the tribes of Israel. One of the best examples of this difference in blood is recorded in the Book of Genesis. It is the birth of Esau and Jacob. They were twin brothers, yet, according to what is revealed they were as far apart as though they had been born to parents of different nationalities. Perhaps this is explained by Mendel's Law governing the differences in parental offspring." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Answers to Gospel Questions*, Vol. III [1960], pp. 63-4.)

17. Patriarch in Salt Lake Valley. I had a conversation with Ron Beckstrom on June 13, 1986, concerning his experience as a stake patriarch for about nine years. These were his comments:

1. Most blessings pronounce the recipient as being from Ephraim. The second most common is Manassah and the third is Dan.
2. He recently saw a study of patriarchal blessings given in Japan, a study that covered about 2,600 blessings. The ratio of tribes was the same as that for the U.S.: Ephraim, Manassah and Dan.
3. He knows of several black members whose lineage has been pronounced as Ephraim.

18. We Are All Mixtures. According to Eldred G. Smith, the last Church Patriarch before the office was eliminated, "We are all mixtures. There is no such thing, as far as I have been able to determine, as any one of us being just one lineage and no other mixture in our genealogy at all. . . . So it is the right of the Patriarch to declare which line through which the blessings will come. In other words, he's giving blessings, he's not declaring lineage by terms of just genealogy. He's declaring lineage in terms of blessing. You go to a Patriarch to get a blessing. If you can get that distinction, it will help you to understand." (Irene Bates, *Dialogue*, Fall, 1993, p. 5.)

a. Not Literal Blood Descent. "In private conversation, Patriarch Eldred G. Smith added that he did not personally interpret his own declarations of lineage to refer to literal blood descent but was rather trying to turn the recipient's attention toward the provisions of the blessing itself and away from any preoccupation with literal lineage. Currently, stake patriarchs are simply instructed to 'contemplate an inspired declaration of the lineage of the recipient,' without specifying further the meaning of that phrase." (Armand L. Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," *Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 1999, p. 169.)

19. We All Descend From Same People. "The extent of our multiple interrelatedness is brought home even more dramatically, however, by traditional, vertical genealogy. 'It is virtually certain . . . that you are a direct descendant of Muhammad and every fertile predecessor of his, including Krishna, Confucius, Abraham, Buddha, Caesar, Ishmael and Judas Iscariot,' [Guy] Murchie writes. 'Of course, you must also be descended from millions who have lived since Muhammad, inevitably including kings and criminals, but the earlier they lived the

more surely you are their descendants.'" (Alex Shoumatoff, *The Mountain of Names: A History of the Human Family*, 1985, p. 245.)

20. Blood Strain Irrelevant. "If we are all of one blood and virtual descendants, every one of us, of father Abraham, then claims to 'lineage and station,' 'nobility,' and rights by virtue of a select 'blood strain' are at best specious and quite irrelevant in today's Church." (Steven Epperson, "Some Problems with Supersessionism in Mormon Thought." *BYU Studies* 34, no. 4 (1994-1995): 134.)

21. Recent Trends in Patriarchal Blessings. "As the importance of literal lineage has declined, some modern stake patriarchs have acquired modified understandings about the significance of lineage declared in patriarchal blessings. No doubt many patriarchs, leaders, and members still regard the 'declaration of lineage' as referring to literal, genealogical descent or 'blood.' Yet others use less literal terms such as *assign*, *identify*, *specify*, or simply *give*. I have asked a least two dozen stake patriarchs to explain how they understand their citing of a person's lineage. . . . At one end is the traditional explanation that by inspiration the patriarch identifies a person's literal descent. At the other end are some who routinely assign a person to the tribe of Ephraim, simply because that is the lineage given responsibility for the Lord's kingdom in this dispensation. Between these two positions are some patriarchs who occasionally feel inspired to specify an unusual lineage (perhaps for manifest racial reasons) but who routinely name Ephraim. Still others explain that lineage is indeed assigned by inspiration but does not necessarily have anything to do with actual ancestry." (Armand L. Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," *Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 1999, p. 168.)

22. Encyclopedia of Mormonism. "William James Mortimer, writing in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, covers both ends of the spectrum. The patriarch 'seeks inspiration to specify the dominant family line that leads back to Abraham,' he said, but 'whether this is a pronouncement of blood inheritance or of adoption does not matter. . . . It is seen as the line and legacy through which one's blessings are transmitted.' The very ambiguity in this range of understandings serves the purpose, whether intended or not, of deemphasizing the importance of literal lineage; it thereby supports the more general trend toward universalizing access to the 'royal lineage.'" (*Ibid.*, p. 169.)

23. Instructions to South African Patriarch. "Andrew Clark, a journalist formerly with the *Johannesburg Weekly Mail* and a member of the Chevy Chase Ward near Washington, D.C., in 1994, reported to me a conversation which he had overheard during 1994 in Johannesburg, South Africa, between an area president and a local stake patriarch, who had considered all blacks as incapable by definition of having Israelite lineage. According to Clark, the area president explicitly instructed the patriarch that, according to the General Authorities, all black Latter-day Saints should be assigned to the tribe of Ephraim." (Armand L. Mauss, "In Search of Ephraim," *Journal of Mormon History*, Spring 1999, p. 168.)

24. God Accepts All Nations. "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (*New Testament*, Acts 10:34.)

a. "Know ye not that there are more nations than one? Know ye not that I, the Lord your God, have created all men, and that I remember those who are upon the isles of the sea; and that I rule in the heavens above and in the earth beneath; and I bring forth my word unto the children of men, yea, even upon all the nations of the earth?" (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 29:7.)

b. None Are Forbidden. "Behold, hath the Lord commanded any that they should not partake of his goodness? Behold I say unto you, Nay; but all men are privileged the one like unto the other and none are forbidden." (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 26:28.)

c. All Are Alike Unto God. ". . . he inviteth them all to come unto him and partake of his goodness; and he denieth none that come unto him, black and white, bond and free, male and female; and he

remembereth the heathen; and all are alike unto God, both Jew and Gentile.” (*Book of Mormon*, 2 Nephi 26:33.)

d. All Are of One Blood. “God that made the world and all things therein . . . hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” (*New Testament*, Acts 17:24-26.)

25. Gospel Transcends Nationality and Color. In 1979 Apostle Howard W. Hunter said, “The gospel of Jesus Christ transcends nationality and color, crosses cultural lines, and blends distinctiveness into a common brotherhood. . . . *All* men are invited to come unto him and *all* are alike unto him. Race makes no difference; color makes no difference; nationality makes no difference. . . . As members of the Lord’s church, we need to lift our vision beyond personal prejudices. We need to discover the supreme truth that indeed our Father is no respecter of persons.” (*Ensign*, June 1979, pp. 72, 74.)

a. Entire Human Race from a Single God. At the October 1991 general conference, Elder Hunter said, “In the message of the gospel, the entire human race is one family descended from a single God. . . . This is a message of life and love that strikes squarely against all stifling traditions based on race, language, economic or political standing . . . or cultural background, for we are all of the same spiritual descent.” (*Ensign*, November 1991, pp. 18-19.)

b. No Superior Race or Culture. President James E. Faust, second counselor in the First Presidency, said at the April 1995 general conference, “In my experience, no race or class seems superior to any other in spirituality and faithfulness.” (“Heirs to the Kingdom of God,” *Ensign*, May 1995, p. 61.)

c. Race Superiority is an Abhorrent and Tragic Theory. On 9 Dec. 1987, the Church issued this formal statement on the belief in racial superiority: “We say again, as we have said many times before, that we believe that all men are the children of the same God, and that it is a moral evil for any person or group of persons to deny any human being the right to gainful employment, to full educational opportunity, and to every privilege of citizenship. . . . We repudiate efforts to deny to any person his or her inalienable dignity and rights on the abhorrent and tragic theory of the superiority of one race or color over another.” (*Ensign*, Feb. 1988, p. 74.)

d. Cultural Superiority Also An Abhorrent Theory. A somewhat differently worded statement was issued in 1992. “All men and women are children of God. It is morally wrong for any person or group to deny anyone his or her inalienable dignity on the tragic and abhorrent theory of racial or cultural superiority. We call upon all people everywhere to recommit themselves to the time-honored ideals of tolerance and mutual respect.” (*Church News*, Oct. 24, 1992, p. 4.)

26. An Apology. Elder Alexander B. Morrison, in the September 2000 *Ensign* magazine, wrote: “In common with other Christians, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints regret the actions and statements of individuals who have been insensitive to the pain suffered by the victims of racism and ask forgiveness for those guilty of this grievous sin.” (*Ensign*, September 2000.)

27. All Are Alike Unto God. The Third Lecture on Faith states “God is no respecter of persons, and that every man in every nation has an equal privilege.”

28. Don't Assume Too Much About Your Blessings. “Our condition, position, situation upon the earth must be the result of causes operating before we came into possession of our mortal bodies. Now let it not be assumed that the man who counts himself most blessed in the things of the earth was, therefore, most deserving, for the things of the earth may not be, after all, the greatest blessings of God.” (James E. Talmage, *Liahona: The Elder's Journal* 5 [29 Feb. 1908], p. 992.)

29. Statements Affirming Equality. Since receipt of the 1978 priesthood revelation, Church leaders are increasingly speaking out concerning the brotherhood of mankind. The following statements are typical:

a. Howard W. Hunter. “Do you imagine our Heavenly Father loving one nationality of his offspring more exclusively than others?” (“All Are Alike Unto God,” *Ensign*, June 1979, p. 72.)

b. We Are All Brothers and Sisters. “At the 1988 dedication of an Oakland chapel, then-general authority Paul Dunn said that all people, black, brown or white, are sons and daughters of God. ‘Do you think when we get to the other side of the veil the Lord is going to care whether you came from Tonga or New Zealand or Germany or America,’ Dunn said. ‘No. That’s why we call each other brothers and sisters.’” (*Salt Lake Tribune*, Feb. 10, 1996, p. C2.)

c. We Cannot Judge Others. Over one hundred years ago, apostle Abraham H. Cannon told a general conference crowd: “. . . and many of these very beings whom we look upon as degraded and low are living nearer to the law of God as written in their souls than are the so-called Christian nations of the earth, who boast of their enlightenment, their wisdom, and their inspiration.” (*Collected Discourses*, Vol. 4, [1894], Edited by Brian Stuy, 1991, p. 113.)

d. Chieko Okazaki. Recent Relief Society general presidency member Chieko Okazaki told a conference crowd: “Diversity is a strength. I attend a lot of meetings where I’m the only woman. And I attend many, many meetings where I’m the only Oriental woman. . . . Have you ever had the feeling that you’re the odd one, the different one? Maybe even too odd or different for this church? The truth is that you’re not odd—you’re special. When white light falls on a wall, it makes a white wall. But when it passes through a prism, that same light makes a rainbow on the wall. . . . [Like God during creation, I say] ‘Let there be light! All kinds of light! Red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and violet light. We need our differences.’” (Chieko Okazaki, *Lighten Up!*, Deseret Book Co., 1992, p. 17.)

e. Elder Carmack’s Statement. “We do not believe that any nation, race, or culture is a lesser breed or inferior in God’s eyes. Those who believe or teach such doctrine have no authority from either the Lord or his authorized servants.” (John K. Carmack, *Tolerance: Principles, Practices, Obstacles, Limits*, Bookcraft, 1993, p. 64.)

f. Elder Groberg’s Statement. John H. Groberg, the LDS area president in southern California in 1992, explained, “Our prime role . . . is not to teach people English or how to become American. . . . We declare Christ, not English. Our mission is not limited to culture.” (*Ensign*, September 1992, p. 36.)

30. Who Are of Abraham’s Lineage? “In a realistic sense, the true lineage of Abraham is those who receive the gospel; and, according to John A. Widtsoe, whether this lineage is of blood or adoption does not matter.” (Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church*, 1978, p. 25.)

a. Community of Faith, Not Blood. “Through marriage in the temple, participants become inheritors of all the blessings of Abraham. . . . Since there is no special race or family through which all generations will attain exaltation, the great patriarchal chain is a lineage of the faithful and righteous. No other lineage will survive. Thus we see that Israel is not limited to a particular people or place. Latter-day Israel is not a community of blood; it is a community of faith. Israel refers to those of all nations, kindreds, tongues, and peoples who wholeheartedly respond to the will of God.” (Spencer J. Palmer, *The Expanding Church*, 1978, p. 28. Also see Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, 1966, pp. 13-15.)

b. Blessing Given to Abraham. “And I will bless them through thy name; for as many as receive this Gospel shall be called after thy name, and shall be accounted thy seed, and shall rise up and bless thee, as their father.” (*Pearl of Great Price*, Abraham 2:10.)

31. All Followers of Christ Are Abraham’s Seed. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye

Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (*New Testament*, Galatians 3:28-9.)

32. A Final Word. "When a white man becomes a member of the Church, he has to give up discrimination. Why can't I do it too? When I joined the Church, many of my family were very angry. They asked me how I felt amongst whites. . . . Many people used to come and visit me. They would tell me I must stay in a church that is only black. But that is discrimination. If I was to stay in a church that is only black, that is not the Church of Jesus Christ; that is a church of black people. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints includes everybody." (Elias M. Vis, Sr., Xhosa tribe, South Africa; told in "*All Are Alike Unto God*," edited by E. Dale LeBaron, 1990, p. 194.)

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