



RASTAFARIANS: WHO ARE THEY AND WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?



Rastafarians, or Rastas, with their black woollen cap with the red green and gold stripes, their dreadlocks, and perhaps wearing a Bob Marley T-shirt, are not hard to pick out in a crowd. But who are they and what do they believe?

According to *Collins English Dictionary*, Rastafarians, are members of a Jamaican cult that regards Ras Tafari (the former emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie) as God. Haile Selassie, whose full name is Ras Tafari Makonnen, lived from 1892-1975, and was emperor of Ethiopia from 1930-36 and 1941-1974. During the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1936-41) he lived in exile in England. He was a prominent member of the Pan-African movement, a movement advocating for political unity among African countries.

THEIR HISTORY

When Ras Tafari was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia in 1930, it fulfilled the prophecy of a Jamaican idealist, Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who founded the *Universal Negro Improvement Association*. He had prophesied that a black king would be crowned in Africa who would call Negroes home. He dreamed of a great, black return to Africa, and even founded a shipping line to carry this out, but was put in jail when the shipping line went bankrupt.

At first his prophecy appeared to be just a deluded dream, but when Ras Tafari was crowned, and numerous titles were bestowed on him, such as "*Conquering Lion of Judah*", "*King of Kings*" and "*Lord of Lords*", the people's opinion of Garvey changed, and he was hailed as a hero and the father of black nationalism.

It wasn't long before some Jamaicans related the titles given to Haile Selassie (which means "*power of the Trinity*") with those used in the Book of Revelation for Jesus Christ (Revelation 5:2-5 and 19:16). They came to see Haile Selassie as the Living God, and the Book of Revelation as an allegory about them and their suffering. Rastafarians came to believe that Haile Selassie was the new Messiah for the black people of the world.

In the 1950's and 60's, thousands of Jamaicans tried to escape their lives of poverty by migrating to England. But there, they were discriminated against and, in the words of a Rasta, "*rejected like a transplanted heart*". At first, the Rastafarians envisioned a physical return to Africa, and some did return there, but the majority came to see Rastafarianism as a spiritual journey towards a deeper sense of African identity.

THEIR ETHIOPIAN ROOTS

It is said that Ethiopia, the homeland of the Rastafarians, was first evangelised in the early fourth century, and for several centuries it remained largely a Christian country. But with the spreading of Islam, Christian Ethiopia became isolated. Its people then developed the myth that their royal line was descended from King Solomon's Son and the Queen of Sheba. This myth

served to give the Ethiopians a national identity, and culminated with Haile Selassie declaring himself a direct descendant of King Solomon, and being worshipped as Messiah by the Rastas.

THE DEATH OF THEIR MESSIAH

Today, around seven thousand Rastafarians are still in Jamaica, even though Garvey had said they would leave the West Indies by 1960. Haile Selassie himself, visited Jamaica in 1966 and was given a reception fit for the Messiah - since to them, that was who he was. When Haile Selassie died in 1975, many Rastafarians refused to believe that he had died. After all, one would think, it is impossible for God to die. However, as Christians well know, Jesus did "the impossible" and died for us on the cross of Calvary, that we might be saved from our sins, and have life eternal.

The younger generation of Rastas have given up the idea that Selassie was divine, but some still see him as a continuing spiritual presence in their lives.

In New Zealand, the Rastas have made their presence felt in the humble settlement of Ruatoria on the East Coast of the North Island. There would hardly be a person in the country who had not heard of the many arsons and other "disturbances" that have hit the small town, largely committed by misguided Rastafarians, trying to break out of the white-mans' mould. "But", you might well ask, "how did they come to be in Ruatoria? and what have they to do with the Rastafarians of Jamaica?"

THE BOB MARLEY ERA

Bob Marley was born in 1945 and grew up in poverty in Jamaica. After working for a time in America, he returned home and formed a band called the Wailers. It was largely through his music that both reggae music and Rastafarianism gained widespread popularity, and were spread to many lands, including New Zealand. Much of his music spoke about their slavery; even when they were set free they were still enslaved by poverty. Indeed, the roots of reggae lay in slave songs. His songs also spoke about how their ancestors were cut off from their own people and culture. Marley died of cancer in 1981, but both his music, and the music of those following in his footsteps, lives on - especially in Ruatoria!

THEIR LIFE STYLE

One can be as committed to the Rasta way of life as they wish - ranging from those who just wear dreadlocks, the Rasta colours and call God "Jah", to those who are deeply committed. These deeply committed Rastafarians are very natural living people, never eating canned foods or other man made or produced foods. They follow a system of prayer and meditation, often aided by the "*holy herb*" ("*ganja*" or cannabis). They justify their use of this drug by Genesis 1:9 and Revelation 22:2. Rastafarians would, no doubt, like their sacramental use of the "*holy weed*" to be made legal, just as alcohol (which, incidentally, they don't

touch), or the drinking of wine in communion is. To Rastas, deceit, lying, stealing and evil thoughts are all forbidden.

The Rasta's dreadlocks and colours may cause them to be easily spotted, but they also have their meanings. The dreadlocks are justified, they say, by Samson, the great Bible character, and by Numbers 6:5-6. And the colours black, green and red are the Ethiopian colours. These were adopted by Marcus Garvey, who interpreted them to mean black for black people, green for nature and red for the blood of slaughtered Africans. Gold was also added by the Rastas, who then wore the four colours as a badge of identity.

WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?

Many Rastafarians are not clear on what they actually believe, since there are no clear set of beliefs or dogmas which they are all required to believe in. So it is highly likely that many will not have even heard of some of the following statements.

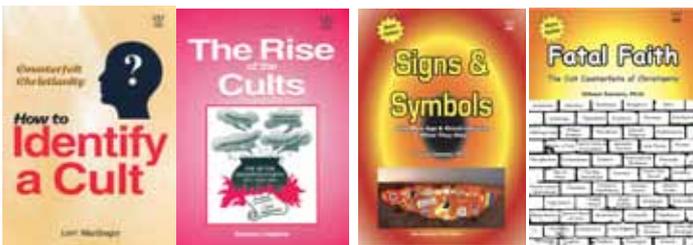
The Rastas call their God *Jah*, a shortened form of *Jehovah* (See Psalm 68:4 in the King James Version.) To Rastas, Jah is the centre of their spirituality. Rastas believe that Jesus was black (which is no worse than saying he was blonde with blue eyes). They also say that God, the Israelites and all the early Christians were black. As an extension of this, they also believe that the Bible was written by and for black people.

They believe that God became man - not as Jesus Christ, but as Haile Selassie. They say that when Haile Selassie died he simply went to another dimension, and is still alive in that other dimension. They believe that they are the true Jews, and that they, and all other blacks, will be truly free only when they are back in their homeland of Africa.

Some Rastafarians believe in reincarnation, and say that they remember their journeys in the slave ships.

CONCLUSION

Those who have come out of the Rastafarian movement and become Christians, say it is a cult, a counterfeit of Christianity, following a false messiah. The Rastafarians are people who need to know Jesus Christ, the real Jesus Christ of the Bible, as their Lord and Saviour. Haile Selassie died, and didn't rise again, but Jesus did rise again! Put your trust in Him today.



"Counterfeit Christianity: How to Identify a Cult" (E-Book)

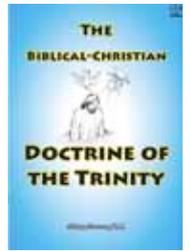
"The Rise of the Cults" (Book, E-Book)

"Signs & Symbols - Cult, New Age & Occult insignia & what they mean" (Book, E-Book)

"Fatal Faith - the Cult Counterfeits of Christianity" (Book, E-Book, DVD)

The resources shown are available, along with others on various spiritual deceptions, from our secure webshop. Bible Studies without a cult bias are also available - please inquire for details. There are also a variety of articles of interest, plus prayer guidelines for breaking cult and other curses for free down-load.

(Space does not permit an extensive listing of Scriptures. Please download our free E-book on the Trinity from the "Free Stuff" part of our web-shop - see below)



"The Biblical-Christian Doctrine of the Trinity" (FREE E-Book)

DON'T SETTLE FOR A FALSE MESSIAH

You can have real Life in Jesus. You don't have to accept counterfeits. God's plan for you is simple but full of great blessing.

1. God loves you and wants to give you an abundant life. **"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."** (John 3:16).

2. Man is separated from God because of man's sin. Thus, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life. **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."** (Romans 3:23). **"... There is none righteous, not even one."** (Romans 3:10)

3. Jesus Christ is the only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life. **"But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."** (Romans 5:8). **"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.'" (John 14:6)**

4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. **"But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name."** (John 1:12). **"... Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you shall be saved..." (Acts 16:31)**

If you do not know Jesus Christ personally, we encourage you to ask Him into your heart, because **"there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."** (Acts 4:12). Accept the wonderful, complete gift of love which God the Father has offered in His only Son Jesus, and you too can know the joy of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

JESUS CHRIST IS THE REAL THING!

"Have nothing to do with the things of darkness, but rather expose them." (Ephesians 5:11)

"Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (John 14:6)



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