

Are the Jews Edomites (Idumeans)?

**By Craig M White
Version 1.0**

"... for salvation is from the Jews." (John 4:22, ESV)
"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." (Romans 1:16, ESV)
"So I ask, did they stumble in order that they might fall? By no means! Rather, through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!" (Romans 11:11-12, ESV)

Introduction

The assertion that Jews are descendants of Esau (Edom), has been a view expressed by some Christians over time. This opinion has oftentimes been more of a curiosity and by others more of an accusation of inherent evil.

Although the view is mainly discussed in British-Israelite and Christian Identity circles, it seems to not represent a fundamental principle of classical British Israelism. Early promoters of British-Israelism such as John Wilson and Edward Hine were predominantly philosemitic, recognising Jews (or most of them) as part of the House of Judah.

Nevertheless, an antisemitic perspective emerged in mid-20th-century literature which contended that Edomites or Idumeans had intermingled with, or largely replaced, real Judahites following the Hasmonean conquest. That, together with the belief that modern Jewry (especially Ashkenazim or Central European Jews) descended from the Khazars, cemented the belief in Jewish Esau-Edom descent. From this, weird ideas that Revelation 2:9 and 3:9 referred to modern-day Jews and that they were the "seed of Satan" or descendants of Cain - emerged. These accuse the Jews of being Satanists and the inventors of Communism.

NB: in many articles and papers I pull back from one that is expounds on the subject at hand to ensure that it is of a size and nature to be easy to absorb and understand. In other

words many of these pieces are contained to shorter than otherwise would have been the case to serve this purpose.

Conversion of some Idumeans to Judaism

The Edomites (referred to as Idumeans during the Greco-Roman era), were historically regarded as descendants of Esau. Following the Babylonian conquest and subsequent migrations, numerous Edomites settled in southern Judea, an area known as Idumea. In the late 2nd century BC, John Hyrcanus, a Hasmonean leader, conquered Idumea and compelled its residents to convert to Judaism, leading to the integration of some of them into Jewish society, although many maintained a separate identity and were sometimes regarded with distrust.

The Romans designated rulers of Idumean (Edomite) lineage to govern the Jews in Judea.

Amongst these ruler were Antipater, the father of Herod the Great. See Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 14, Sections 14.127-143, 158-162 which detail Caesar's appointment of Antipater as procurator and the roles of his sons.

In 40 BC, the Roman Senate designated Herod as King of Judea. Refer to details in Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 14, Sections 14.381-389 and *The Jewish War*, Book 1, Sections 1.282-285 (providing a parallel account of the events).

Herod the Great reigned from 37 to 4 BC. Although he was of Idumean (Edomite) descent on his father's side, his mother descended from a noble Nabataean (Arab) family. Despite his adherence to Judaism, his Jewish subjects frequently viewed him with resentment, perceiving him as a foreign usurper and a 'half-Jew.' Again, refer to Flavius Josephus, in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 14, Section 14.403 and Book 15, Sections 15.253-267.

Following Herod's demise, Rome partitioned his kingdom among his sons, such as Herod Archelaus, who became the ethnarch of Judea, and Herod Antipas, who was appointed tetrarch of Galilee.

The question naturally arises: 'What percentage of Idumeans was the Jewish community at that time composed of?' From all I am able to make out, no documented percentage can be ascertained. The demographics of that time are based on estimates derived from archaeological investigations, accounts by Josephus, and modern-day scholarly models. There are no census records or dependable ethnic counts from this period.

"Hyrcanus also captured Dora and Marissa, cities of Idumea, and subdued all the Idumeans; he allowed them to remain in that land, provided they would circumcise their genitals and adhere to Jewish laws... and they were so eager to live in the land of their ancestors that they complied... and from that point onward, they were regarded as Jews." (Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 13, Section 1)

Scholars still argue about whether the Idumeans' conversion was mostly forced or more of an assimilation thing, but it worked pretty well either way. Idumeans ended up fighting right alongside other Jews in later revolts - for example, Josephus reports that around

20,000 Idumean soldiers showed up to help defend Jerusalem during the revolt of 66–70 BC (Flavius Josephus, *Jewish War*, Book 4, Sections 272, 311).

Percentage of Jews who were of Idumean Heritage

After the Hasmonean conquest, Idumea got folded into Judean territory. Archaeology from sites like Maresha (Marissa) suggests the area was fairly sparsely populated when it was taken, and a good deal of the later "Jewish" character came from Judean immigrants moving in afterward, rather than just from converting the locals. Most Idumeans blended into Jewish religious and cultural life, though they kept some distinct regional flavour -such as acting as their own military or political bloc under Herod. Name studies from pre-conquest Idumean potsherds and suchlike (mainly from the Persian period) show roughly 25% Edomite/Idumean names, about 30% Arabian, and the rest a mix of Aramaic, Judahite/Hebrew, or other Western Semitic names. (see Yigal Levin, "The Religion of Idumea and Its Relationship to Early Judaism," *Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 10 (2020), paper 487).

Scholars estimate the total population of Judea (which includes Judea, Idumea, Galilee) during the late Hasmonean/early Herodian period (c. 167–37 BC) to be between 100,000 and 500,000 or more, with growth towards approximately 500,000 to over 1 million by the 1st century AD (prior to the 70 AD revolt). These figures represent very broad estimates.

Following integration, the Idumean/Edomite-descended population likely represented a minority of the overall Jewish population with possibly around 10 to 20% or less. This is an informed estimate rather than a documented statistic; core Judea and Galilee had established Judean populations, while forced or induced conversions in Idumea and Galilee introduced additional groups but did not achieve numerical dominance. In fact, some areas experienced more immigration from Judea proper than local retention.

Israel Finkelstein examines the territorial extent and demographics of Judea during the Persian and early Hellenistic periods, estimating the population of Judea at approximately 100,000 to 200,000 in the early Hasmonean period (Israel Finkelstein, "The Territorial Extent and Demography of Yehud/Judea in the Persian and Early Hellenistic Periods," *Revue Biblique*, Vol. 117, No. 1 (2010), pp. 39–54). While Yigal Levin offers a comprehensive analysis of Idumean identity and integration in "The Religion of Idumea and Its Relationship to Early Judaism," *Religions*, Vol. 11, No. 10 (2020), discussing names, ethnicity, and post-conquest assimilation.

In short, specialists posit that Idumeans (Edomites by descent) became a noticeable but minority element within the Jewish population after assimilation under the Hasmoneans. By Roman times, they were functionally Jews, though some opponents (including Hasmonean rivals) still highlighted their origins for political reasons. Refer also to Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (especially Book 13) and *The Jewish War*, supported by modern archaeological studies of Idumea.

Arguments

In the Medieval period and prior, Christians regarded themselves as the new Israel, replacing the Jews and subsequently persecuted them. In turn the Jews saw their persecutors as Edom. This is brought out in *Jewish European History Between Nation and*

Empire (2019) (chapter 3. *Esau, Ishmael, and Christian Europe: Medieval Edom*, pp. 91-136) by Malachi Hacoen. A summary of this chapter appears online at [Cambridge.org](https://www.cambridge.org/core):

“To medieval European Jews, Esau and Edom meant Christian and Christendom, and Jacob & Esau evoked the messianic vision of Christendom's downfall. "Christian Esau" became an enduring Jewish topos. Spanish (Sephardi) Jews thought of the Jewish Diaspora as living “under Edom and Ishmael” – Ishmael was deemed the Arabs' ancestor – and interpreted the vision of the Four Empires in the Book of Daniel as presaging liberation from Christian and Muslim rule alike... **Jacob & Esau became cosmogonic forces and the "Kings of Edom" represented a cosmogonic disaster**. As Christians became increasingly familiar with rabbinic literature, they polemicized against the Jewish concept of Edom, but late medieval Christian biblical commentary reflected Jewish views of Edom.” [emphasis mine]

Some Jews to this day see Rome as Esau and even Germany!

However, by the nineteenth century, the belief that the Jews were Esau began to emerge and found its way into the British-Israel movement.

The most comprehensive British-Israelite text promoting this perspective, as far as this author is aware, is Clifford Parker's *A Short Study of Esau-Edom in Jewry* (first edition 1948, revised 1949) which elaborates on earlier articles published in the British-Israel World Federation's *The National Message*. In the introduction to Chapter 2, Parker remarks:

“ARTICLES in the National Message identifying the seed of Esau with modern Jewry have caused a certain amount of perplexity to those who have been accustomed to regard the Turk as the progeny of Jacob's twin brother...” (p. 17, 1949 edition).

He argues for this as being in harmony with British-Israel beliefs by differentiating “true Judah,” a devout remnant often associated with Sephardim, from the majority Edomite-influenced grouping within “Jewry” (pp. 35-36, 39), which true Judah should ultimately forsake to unite with Ephraim-Israel (the Anglo-Keltic nations) under Christ (p. 80).

Parker does not assert that all Jews are Edomites; he estimates that the Edomite/Khazar influence is predominantly found among the Ashkenazim (Central/European Jews, approximately 92% of the global Jewish population at that time), while the Sephardim are more likely to retain authentic Judahite lineage.

“EMPHASIS has been laid upon the identification of Idumean, or false Jewry, in the world to-day. This should not be allowed to distort our conception of Jewry as a whole. We know of no evidence indicating that more than a part of modern Jewry is of Edomite origin; our data point to this element being mainly, but perhaps not entirely, contained in the Ashkenazim, or Central European Jews, whose numbers increased, especially in the eighth century A.D. and thereabouts, through the

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proselytising of the Khazars, a people of obscure, but **probably** Asiatic, non-Semitic origin. **The Edomite element may, for all we know, be a minority among the Ashkenazim**, among whom we must also allow for the existence of a proportion, as indicated by anthropological and historical data generally, of people who might claim descent from Judah. Ashkenazic Jewry is thus comprised of three elements of not exactly known proportions: (a) those of Judahite descent; (b) those of Idumean origin; (c) proselytes of other origins.

Although it may be that the Edomite element in Ashkenazic Jewry comprises only a minority, it is certain, as we have seen from anthropological data, that those of the tribe of Judah are so,¹ and that the religious principles and practices of the latter have been rendered ineffective by the former.” (pp. 41-42) [emphasis mine]

The Sephardim are even characterised as the 'aristocracy' of Jewry which are orthodox, anti-Zionist, and holding a condescending view towards the Ashkenazim (p. 35). It *may* have been true when Parker wrote, but the vast majority of Sephardic Jews definitely support Zionism today.

Finally, it is clear that Parker presents his argument as a means of enhancing (rather than contradicting) British-Israelism, but adds to it the notion that Edomite "Jewry" lacks any legitimate claim to Palestine and that authentic Judahites are encouraged to join with Britain-Israel in Christ.

Unfortunately, Parker's work seems to commence a shift towards Christian Identity doctrine - an extremist, antisemitic offshoot within the larger British-Israel movement. Such was never conceived of or supported by its nineteenth century founders.

I won't summarise Parker's arguments here, but you can read them for yourself online.

Conclusions

It is clear that most Jews do not descend from Khazars or Edomites, though a small minority do. This is proven both by genetics and history.

In my paper *Where are the Edomites Today?* (2024) I noted:

“Some of them moved westwards and became Hellenised and Judaized. As a result they became known as Idumaeans. Herod the Great was an Idumaeen. Probably in the 7th century BC, the Nabataeans, a nomadic Arabic tribe appear in the land of the Edomites, replacing them or displacing them in some, yet unspecified way not yet clear to historians. The sedentary state of the Edomites had practically ceased under the lax rule of the Persians and the Edomites must have migrated out of southern Jordan: “of these early migrations we know nothing.” (Peter Parr, “The Capital of The Nabataeans,” *Scientific American*, Special Issue, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1994, p. 32).” (p. 5)

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“The Edomites were also known as *Idumaeans*, probably due to some intermarriage between Edomites and Dumah, the descendant of Ishmael. In Turkey we find the areas of Duman, Duman Dag mountain and Dumanli Dag mountains. And in India the town of Dumagudiem and Duma mountains.” (p. 21)

Today part of the Central Asian peoples descend from Edom as do many Turks who migrated out of that region, settling in Turkey centuries ago.

Clearly the Jews are not descended from this stock.

Recommended Reading

- *Jewish Origins* by Craig M White.
- *Notes on the Bible and Genetics* by Craig M White.
- *The Sanctity of Nationhood in the Bible* by Craig M White.
- *The True Roots and Origin of the Scots* by Craig M White.
- *Where are the Edomites Today?* By Craig M White.
- *Where are the ‘Lost’ Tribes of Israel in the Modern World? An Introduction* by Craig M White.

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