

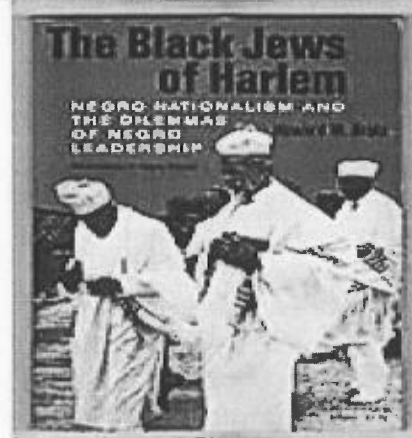
## Spiritual Leadership

Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation – Beth Ha-Tefilah Headquarters is 97 years old; one of the oldest Israelite synagogues in North America and the Western Hemisphere has been led by a succession of rabbis since its inception in 1919.

ז והביאותים אל-הַר קֹדֶשׁי, וְשַׁמְחֹתִים בְּבֵית תַּפְלַחַי--עֹלֹתֵיהֶם וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרִצּוֹן, עַל-מִזְבְּחִי: כִּי בֵיתִי, בַּיַּת-תַּפְלָה יִקְרָא לְכָל-הָעַמִּים.

“Even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer; their burnt-offerings and their sacrifices shall be acceptable upon Mine altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” Isaiah Chapter 56:7

‘We believe the people Moses led out of Egypt were black’



Yoseh ben Moshe ben Yehuda “Chief Rabbi Wentworth Arthur Matthew zt”l” (1892 – 1973), was a visionary, educator and prolific scholar who founded Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation – Beth Ha-Tefilah Headquarters “Commandment Keepers” in Harlem, New York in 1919 during the height of the Marcus Garvey movement and the Harlem Renaissance. Chief Rabbi Matthew was Chief of the Ethiopian Hebrews of the Western Hemisphere. He was influenced by the late Rabbi Arnold Josiah Ford, the first black rabbi in America, a prominent member of Harlem's Black Jewish community, and a musical director to the great Marcus Garvey. The congregation under Rabbi Matthew’s tutelage survived World War I, the Depression, World War II and the Civil Rights era. In 1942 Chief Rabbi Matthew published his Minute Book, a short history of the congregation’s evolution. In 1964 Howard Brotz, featured Chief Rabbi Matthew in his book entitled: *The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (New York: The Free Press, 1964). In April 1968 the Sepia, a photojournalistic magazine, featured an article entitled: *Black Jews of Harlem* where Chief Rabbi Matthew stated: ‘We believe the people Moses led out of Egypt were black.’ In 1970 the congregation was featured in a scene from the 1970 motion picture *The Angel Levine* which starred Harry Belafonte and Zero Mostel. During his tenure, Chief Rabbi Matthew also founded the Royal Order and Ethiopian Hebrew Rabbinical College. He had relationships with Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Percy Sutton, Congressman Charles Rangel, Sammy Davis, Jr., Harry Belafonte and Rabbi Irving Block.



Rabbi Chaim White (1923 – 1997) received spiritual guidance under the leadership of Chief Rabbi Matthew. He enrolled in the Ethiopian Hebrew Rabbinical College and after eight years of intense study during the evening was ordained Rabbi Chaim White in 1971. He was one of the last rabbis ordained by Chief Rabbi Matthew prior to Chief Rabbi Matthew's death in 1973. In 1975 Rabbi Chaim White succeeded Chief Rabbi Matthew as spiritual leader by majority vote from the congregation. He was spiritual leader as well as President of the Board of Trustees for more than 23 years. He also served on the Rabbinical Council for several years. Rabbi White is featured in a one-hour video documentary on the Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation entitled: *The Commandment Keepers* directed by Marlaine Glicksman: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stKpJhTYn9I>



Rabbi Yhoshua Ben Yahanatan zt"l graduated with a Doctorate Degree in Levitical Priesthood from the Ethiopian Hebrew Rabbinical College in 1965. He was ordained by Chief Rabbi Wentworth Arthur Matthew. Rabbi Yahanatan was the President of the Ethiopian Hebrew Israelite Rabbinical Council and one of the organizers of the Israelite Board of Rabbis Inc. and the Rabbinical Academy of that board which trained and ordained rabbis in the Ethiopian Hebrew community. Rabbi Yahanatan's leadership contributed to the spiritual viability of the Ethiopian Hebrew community in the Western Hemisphere. Rabbi Yohanatan succeeded Rabbi Chaim White zt"l as acting spiritual leader until he retired in 2000.



Rabbi Zechariah HaLewi ibn Abraham zt"l (1956 – 2015) a graduate of the class of 2000 from the Israelite Rabbinical College ushered in the new millennium as spiritual leader and President of the Board of Trustees. He spearheaded an operational plan embracing the vision, mission, values and objectives of the late Chief Rabbi Matthew's legacy.

As a recent graduate of the Rabbinical College, Rabbi Lewi had new ideas for transformation. Rabbi Lewi moved Beth Tefilah's headquarters to Newark, New Jersey to advance its worship, to continue Torah scholarship, and to fulfill the legacy set forth by our founder Chief Rabbi Matthew zt"l.

On Sunday, July 12, 2015, Rabbi Lewi formally rededicated the synagogue building at 223-227 East Kinney Street, Newark, New Jersey 07105. Featured speakers during the dedication were the Honorable Ras J. Baraka, the 40th Mayor of the City of Newark, Honorable Sharpe James, former Mayor of Newark, New Jersey and member of New Jersey Senate and Councilwoman Mildred C. Crump.

On September 21, 2015, Rabbi Lewi was gravely injured in a hit-in-run accident and succumbed to his injuries on September 27, 2015. Articles providing details of the tragic accident were published in local papers in New Jersey: *Newark rabbi mourned after fatal hit-and-run in Jersey City NJ* by Michaelangelo Conte in The Jersey Journal and *Tragedy at African-American synagogue Area's Ethiopian Hebrews mourn Newark rabbi killed by hit-and-run* by Robert Wiener in New Jersey Jewish News.