

# Truth About Sankofa--Back to our African Roots



This bird looking backwards is an ancient Andrinka symbolize for the idea of Sankofa--looking backward to learn from our past and to appreciate our identity by going back to our Africans roots. This is a popular modern symbol, too, amongst the Akan people of Ghana, West Africa.

**How legitimate is the 'Sankofa!' rally cry of the so-called "Afrikania" or Afrikan Renaissance movement, from a Christian perspective?**

## **Introduction:**

In considering this issue, let us begin with a profound statment:

**ROOTS ARE LONG.** If you don't believe me, think about what happens if you pull out a dandelion plant or a young mango tree. If you don' work hard to carefully dig way down deep to the end of the root, what happens?

It starts growing again. So--which is the root--the little short stub you pull out? Or the long root that you have to really dig deep to get to the end of it?

It has become very fashionable to cry, Sankofa! Back to our African roots! We see the Sankofa symbol, the bird looking backwards, carved into official buildings in Ghana and stamped into cloth. We find websites and read newspaper articles calling out for a return to our African roots.

This cry, Sankofa, is legitimate, **as far as it goes**. Every people needs to understand its heritage. We all need to value the good that has been handed to us by our ancestors. **The Bible in several places talks about getting back to our roots.**

### **Examples of the Bible taking us back to the root of things:**

**Jesus, divorce and marriage:** When Jesus was asked a difficult question about divorce, when He wanted people to really understand marriage, He took his questioners back to the root of marriage. The Pharisees thought they were going back to their cultural roots when they quoted their ancestor Moses, but Jesus focused their attention on God's purpose for marriage by going deeper down the root--by following the root of marriage back to God's Creation (Mark 10:2-9).

**The book of Genesis:** The Bible begins with the book of Genesis. Do you know what Genesis means? It means **ORIGINS**, which is just another word for **ROOTS**. The Bible does not begin with the birth of Jesus Christ. In a sense the whole Old Testament is a collection of books of ROOTS, or preparations for the coming Messiah. God begins to tell us His story of His love for us by taking us back to our roots, to the origin of humanity.

**The Biblical priesthoods:** Most of the Old Testament gives an accounting of God's dealings with Israel. Israel had a priesthood, described in the Bible book of Exodus. Most Jewish people thought they were going back to their roots by remembering how God chose their ancestor Aaron and his sons to be the first priests for their nation (Exodus 28). Jesus was also a priest, but to understand His priesthood, we have to go back past Exodus, past the ancestors of the Jewish people, to the first book of the Bible--the book of Genesis (Genesis 14:18-20, also referred to in the New Testament book of Hebrews 5:6 and 7:1-17). We have to go past the levitical priesthood that had been handed to the Jews by their immediate ancestors. God said that the priesthood of Jesus had deeper roots than that. They had to go past Moses, back to the time of Abraham to understand those roots. Those roots went way back to the ancient priesthood of the order of Melchisedek.

### **An important question: Why do we settle so often for such short roots, when we could tap into the real root that gets back to our real origins?**

It's great to go back to our roots, and not at all an unbiblical idea in itself, as we have already seen. But why do we so often stop short? **Why are we satisfied with such a short section of root?**

### **An important example of settling for short, broken-off roots:**

Here's one example. Many defend the worship of so-called '[lesser gods](#)' on the basis that our African ancestors did it, so it must be right. Yet, the Apostle Paul, in his definitive treatise on Christian doctrine (the Bible book of Romans) condemns the world for its [idolatry](#), and proclaims that before idolatry, our ancestors knew God (Romans 1:21-25).

Some say, 'Let's go back beyond colonialism--back to the time of the black African kingdoms. So we have some groups proposing that Africans go back to the gods of Egypt. From the immense Egyptian pantheon of gods, some groups arbitrarily choose the god [Amen-Ra](#) to worship, while others prefer another god.

This cry is seen both on the continent and in the diaspora. Alex Haley in his well-known book ROOTS sought to go back beyond his American slave ancestry, back to his African heritage. Islamic propagandists urge us to go back beyond modern Christian influence to Islamic tradition. Others urge us to go back beyond

Christianity to African Traditional Religions.

### **A Plea to Dig Deeper**

So, let's find our roots. In this, the Christian faith asks only one thing of us--to **DIG DEEPER**. Get back to the end of the root. Dig up the whole root. Find that taproot--that growing point that pokes its way further and further down into the soil. Only then can we really say that we went back to our roots.

**Back to Egypt**--If you go back to Egypt, don't go back only as far as the history recorded in the Bible book of Exodus, chapters 1-12, where idolatry dominates the nation and ultimately brings great judgment from God. Go back further down the root. Go back nine chapters earlier in the Biblical history, to the book of Genesis chapters 45 & 46. There Pharaoh welcomes the family of Joseph and honors Joseph, a man who worshipped the Creator God. Go back to Genesis chapter 12, where an earlier Pharaoh easily recognizes and obeys the hand of God working in his life.

**Back to Ham**--Go back to Ham, the original ancestor of large parts of Africa, our ancestor who heard God speak and saw Him act, our ancestor who experienced God's grace and loving care at the time of the worldwide Deluge, our ancestor who was blessed by Noah his father (Genesis chapter 9).

If we follow the root down to the time between Noah and Abraham, we find what seems to be a transitional time when many then-young nations are headed toward idolatry, yet they are not totally hardened in its path. There are also at this time in history many exceptions to the idolatrous trend. Some worship the Lord.

Even in the Holy Land that God gave to the Hebrews and their descendants, in early times God promised the land to Abraham and his descendants, yet He did not yet give the land to Abraham immediately, because the 'the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full' (Genesis 15:16). Melchisedek, priest of the city of Salem, was not idolatrous. The Bible describes him as 'priest of the most high God', and uses him as a picture of Christ (Genesis 14:18). In the same period, Job acted as a priest for his family before God (Job 1:5) and was also a priest to God for others (Job 42:7). We don't have specific examples cited in Africa, but we can guess that there could well have been priests in Africa, too, during this period who knew God and worshipped Him faithfully without idolatry. Some of the ancient *Andrinka* symbols of the Akan people, including the famous *Gye Nyame (By God Alone)* seem to indicate this, as well as the fact that virtually all of African traditional religion recognizes the existence of a Supreme Creator God. He may have been pushed to the side as far as worship is concerned in favor of idol gods and so-called lesser deities, but the fact that all Africans still recognize His existence shows that the time when we worshipped Him cannot be long past.

Go back to Creation, the ultimate end of the taproot, where all people find their origin and their ultimate meaning. **We are more than creatures of our ancestors, however much we respect them. We are ultimately creatures of Almighty God, created in His image.** (Genesis 1:27)

Read all the Bible has to say about Africa. You can find prophecies of judgment on African nations because of their idolatry at different periods of history. Isaiah chapter 19 is an example, a prophecy against Egypt. 'Behold, the LORD rides on a swift cloud, and will come into Egypt. The idols of Egypt will totter at His presence, And the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst (Isaiah 19:1). Yet the purpose of the judgment is not ultimately to destroy, but to restore. 'And the LORD will strike Egypt, He will strike it and HEAL IT; they will return to the LORD, and He will be entreated by them and heal them' (Isaiah 19:22). Even in judgment, God shows His love, His mercy, and His good plan and purpose for Africa!

**So yes, SANKOFA! Let's return to our African roots. Roots are long. Let's not break off our roots halfway down in the ground. Let's return all the way. Let's go back past the so-called 'lesser gods'. Let's return to the Creator of African peoples, the Creator of this great continent and all its beautiful families. Let's return to the One, True, Living, Eternal Creator God. The land is sick to its stomach from eating short roots running just under the ground. If we will follow our roots to the taproot, the Creator of Africa is waiting to heal us.**

## **Truth About the Lesser gods**