

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**Debunking the Curse of Ham and its Generational Impact on the Black Race**

Submitted to Dr. Dennis McDonald  
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Thesis

by

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## **Abstract**

The so-called curse of Ham became a major issue for Christian Theology and apologetics. The false interpretation claimed that the Black race were to be enslaved. Therefore, these individuals were subjected to inhuman treatment through the institution of slavery for generations. Many believed that those from Africa did not receive Christianity until after they were kidnapped from their homeland. The false narrative that slavery introduced them to Christ is disingenuous. That is because Christianity prevailed in Africa even before it did in Europe.

Individuals from African contributed immensely to the history and theology of Christianity. Three of the major Christian fathers, Tertullian, Athanasius and Augustine of Hippo were all from Africa. Likewise, the Bible contains a myriad of accounts featuring those of African descent who were devoted to God.

Unfortunately, the misinterpretation of the so-called curse of Ham perpetuated the justification of the forced servitude of those from Africa. This had a lasting impact on the Black race. One result was blacks leaving Christianity. Many were looking to movements like the Nation of Islam and the Hebrew Israelites to affirm their blackness and human dignity. Others severing ties with denominations and starting their own church, like the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

All in all, the Bible, Theology, and Christian history, all illustrate the achievements and contributions of those from the Hamitic line. To continue to propagate the so-called curse of Ham is show contempt for the scriptures and Christian history. By and large, this thesis will show how this false narrative ebbs away at God's ultimate plan for unity.

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## Introduction: Statement of Problem

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,” (Ps. 119:105). It was Jesus himself who taught the disciples to pray saying, “Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” (Matthew 6:9-10). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul writes a letter to Titus. He informs Titus that even in teaching, believers should show integrity and dignity (Titus 2:7). This way those who oppose the gospel message will have nothing bad to say about the ministers of the Lord. As ministers of reconciliation, Christians have the responsibility to exegete the scriptures to engender the heart of God. However, sin has blinded even some believers with a dubious set of lenses. This outlook has resulted in selfishness, destruction and in some instances death.

For decades, the so-called curse of Ham, became a detriment to Christian Theology and apologetics. Many used a false interpretation to foster an ideology that was devastating and deadly to the Black race. The false interpretation claimed that the Black race was destined to be enslaved and inferior to whites.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, these individuals were subjected to brutality for generations. The onslaught of this behavior, resulted in dynamic structural changes for the Black race in church, society, education, and government. Many churches were not the places of piety or liberty that the Bible intended them to be. Some churches became rallying spaces that promoted ungodly behavior toward a segment of God’s creation. Additionally, because of the church’s silence or lack of righteousness on the issue, it aided in the dehumanization of Blacks socially.<sup>2</sup> This dehumanization also helped to lead to feelings of inferiority for some blacks.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, the incorrect interpretation of scriptures has caused many in the Black race to reject Christianity altogether. This is due in part to the historical mistreatment of blacks in the

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<sup>1</sup> John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 27.

<sup>2</sup> Ken Ham and A. Charles Ware, *One Race One Blood* (Arkansas: Master Books, 2021), 40.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

name of God. For many of African descent, the idea of blacks being treated so inhumanly just did not make sense. Especially since scriptures contain accounts detailing the black presence in the Bible. This has led to a growing chorus to accept the pretext that Christianity is a white man's religion. To this point many within the Black race are turning to Islam and other ideologies that affirm Blackness, such as the Hebrew Israelites movement.<sup>4</sup> Equally some believe Christianity works to eradicate anything associated with black culture, because black is deemed evil.

In his book, *The Whitewashing of Christianity*, Jerome Gay speaks to this point. Gay writes, reformed churches which historically are predominantly white see their way as the way.<sup>5</sup> He adds that this allows minorities to feel rejected and not embraced, “because if we express ourselves, we're viewed as overly emotional, unintellectual or even theologically and socially liberal.”<sup>6</sup>

All in all, this thesis will demonstrate how an inaccurate interpretation of scriptures become a false synthesis for Christianity. This false system perpetuated a narrative that debased the Black race, which negatively affected Christianity. By and large this thesis will also discuss God's ultimate plan for mankind despite the false theology that has affected the livelihood of the Black race.

### **Statement of Purpose**

The Bible is clear that mankind was created by God also known as El Elyon and El Olam. These two names describe certain attributes and the nature of the true and living God. As the creator, God gave his creation a set of rules, principles, and ordinances. All his words form the Holy Scriptures. The Bible tells us that “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching,

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<sup>4</sup> Jude 3 Project, “Hebrew Israelites, KJV & Black Identity | Dr. Jamal Hopkins,” February 21, 2019, video, 50:01, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGvtekbc74>.

<sup>5</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, Chicago, 2021), 72.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.



rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,” (2 Tim. 3:16). By using proper exegesis of the scriptures, this thesis will undo the false notion that Christianity is a white man’s religion.

Furthermore, the thesis will refute other hostile ideologies against the Bible. Many people view the Bible as archaic and a tool to keep minds in a mental prison. Likewise, scriptures are seen as a cleansing agent of culture and a false sense of liberation. When it comes to those with African ancestry, Christianity was deemed a white man’s religion. This false ideology stemmed from the groups that used Christianity for their own benefit.<sup>7</sup> In her article entitled *The Bible in Black Theology*, Mukti Barton highlights this point. Barton writes, “following their conversions, enslaved Africans were discouraged from reading the Bible. This shows that the liberating power of the Bible was known to the slaveholders who wanted to bar the slaves from accessing this power.”<sup>8</sup> In this same article a formerly enslaved person by the name of James Curry was mentioned. He testified that, “When my master’s family were all gone away on the Sabbath, I used to go into the house and get down the great Bible and read, taking care, however, to put it back before they returned. There I learned that it was contrary to the revealed will of God, that one man should hold another as a slave.”<sup>9</sup>

Certainly, the Bible focuses on people from Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia. For instance, in 701 B.C.E an African king marched into Syria-Palestine to defend Judah against the invasion of Sennacherib, king of Assyria.<sup>10</sup> Second Kings 19:9 mentions “Tirhakah, king of Cush,” coming to the help of Hezekiah, who was up against the Assyrian superpower.<sup>11</sup> In the Old Testament the prophet Isaiah said, “Those who trusted in Cush and boasted in Egypt will be

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<sup>7</sup> Kevin Burrell, “Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century.” *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 742. DOI:10.3390/rel12090742.

<sup>8</sup> Mukti Barton, “The Bible in Black Theology,” *Black Theology*, 9:1, (2011): 63. DOI: 10.1558/blth.v9i1.57

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Burrell, “Epistles: Biblical Profile: Representing Cush in the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, (2020): 62.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

afraid and put to shame,” (Isa. 20:5). The Book of Daniel talks about Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon coming to Jerusalem and besieging it. Fast forward to the New Testament and there the writers detail many other locations tied to Africa, the Middle East and Asia. On the day of Pentecost Luke writes about men hearing their own native language. Luke says, “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene, visitors from Rome,” (Acts 2:9-10). With that being said, the Bible never espoused one race as superior to another. As a matter of fact, scriptures say, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” (Gal. 3:28).

The Bible indicates, “For God has not appointed us to suffer wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,” (1 Thess. 5:9). Salvation is basically deliverance from the power of evil. For many in the Black race, the evil of slavery through some Christians hands, stripped them of believing in the true God. For some the atrocities conducted in the name of the Bible, served as a catalyst to reject the omnipotent Creator. Comparatively, just like scripture, this research can serve as a tool so “that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which God has called you,” (Eph. 1:18). Albeit proper application of scripture will show the true freeing power of the Word of God.

### **Statement of Importance of the Problem**

Critics are always trying to find a way to discredit the truth of the Bible along with Christianity. The best way to do that is poke holes at the Bible. Those critics do not need to look far since they have some ammunition. That ammunition comes from some in the Body of Christ who have not rightly divided the Word of Truth. Due to improper exegesis of scriptures, the notion of the alleged curse of Ham was in part a blueprint for the inhumane treatment of the

Black race.

Consequently, a spirit of pride, hatred and even superiority entered in the hearts and minds of some believers. This is in direct contrast to the purpose of the Bible. The Holy Scriptures are a roadmap that points someone to their Creator and not a book used to keep one in chains. Those chains ultimately may lead to several stumbling blocks. Jesus told his disciples, “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come,” (Luke 17:1).

This thesis will dispel years of erroneous teaching and beliefs that aided in the oppression of an entire race of people. As a Christian who God created in dark brown flesh, I know what it is like to have to prove that your just as a child of God as other individuals. In the last five years our country has faced calls for racial reckoning due to the unfair treatment of people of color. Once again, some Christians have remained silent afraid to rock the boat on the issues surrounding race. Jerome Gay writes, “Many evangelicals seem to have embraced the myth that talking about or preaching against racism is somehow a distraction from the gospel.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Statement of Position on the Problem**

Embracing righteousness is an important trait that a believer in Jesus Christ needs to have. The Bible exhorts Christians to use the scriptures in a way that will always reflect the love of God. This thesis illustrates that the inhumane treatment levied upon the Black race was in part because of the misunderstanding of scriptures. Pride and selfishness also factored into the equation. Countless research from Biblical and secular scholars help to secure the stance that has been raised by this thesis.

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<sup>12</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, Chicago, 2021), 35.

As it relates to Christianity, those with spheres of influence decided to appease societal beliefs. In the book *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, Author John Patrick Daly highlights this point. Daly writes, most ministers who galvanized southern moral support for slaveholding denied that they were proslavery.<sup>13</sup> He adds, these men repeatedly insisted that good Christians could hold slaves, that slaveholding was moral.<sup>14</sup> Daly also mentions culture fueled this wicked mindset. Daly writes, “Racism was at the heart of southern proslavery, but it was also at the heart of antebellum culture South and North. Antebellum white Americans defined and denigrated blacks in ways that advanced their own interests and confirmed their understandings of themselves.”<sup>15</sup>

In order for their ideology of slavery to take root, many needed the affirmation of a powerful authority. Consequently, the Bible was weaponized to become that great authority. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued that the dynamics of honor and shame in antebellum readings of Noah's curse intended to defend the institution of slavery.<sup>16</sup> Wyatt-Brown argued that proslavery readings of the curse were rooted in a pair of crucial premises: that slaves are debased persons, slavery was the eponymous ancestor of Africans and Ham embodies the dishonorable condition of black slaves.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 31.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>16</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

## Limitations/Delimitations

This thesis will focus primarily on the genealogy of the sons of Noah specifically Ham. Some scholarly and historical research point to the Hamite race as being descendants of those with African ancestry. With this in mind, the thesis will also highlight the black presence in the Bible. This will help in demolishing the ideology that those of the Black race are inferior or did not contribute to Christianity. Christianity belongs to those who follow the ways and life of Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, many across the nation used Christianity for their own benefit.<sup>18</sup> This idea nullified the importance of God creating nations of people. Africans brought over into America under the guise of ethnic cleansing and evangelism has been a focal point in the history of the church. For that reason and more apologetics is often criticized and disregarded.

Engendering the process of slavery and its heinous effects on blacks will help to show why Christianity is often frowned upon. The defense for slavery resulted in other ungodly forms of bondage. For instance, a great number of blacks were killed at the hands of members of the Ku Klux Klan. This group in part worked under the guise of Christianity. In his book, *The Gospel According to the Klan*, Kelly Baker writes, "Protestantism served as the foundation of the movement, and the protection of its religious faith was a key component of the Klan's mission."<sup>19</sup> As for limitations this thesis will not venture into slavery in other parts of the world like Spain, Portugal etc. The thesis will focus only on research surrounding Ham, the Black race, black presence in the Bible and slavery. These topics set the foundation of the paper as well as the structure for the conclusion.

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<sup>18</sup> Kevin Burrell, "Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century." *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 742. DOI:10.3390/rel12090742.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2017), 38.

Finally, this thesis will not become an avenue to bash, ridicule or devalue our white brothers and sisters. That stance would only undermine the need to have a civil discourse about historical events that have impacted the spread of Christianity. Nevertheless, in order to present the thesis in its fullness, it will mention the role that whiteness played.

## Black Race: God's Creation

“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb,” (Rev. 7:9).<sup>20</sup> The Apostle John was very strategic when it came to writing this passage of scripture. The revelation of this great multitude came to him while the Bible records that he was exiled on the island of Patmos. John was privileged to get a glimpse into events surrounding what the Bible refers to as the Great Tribulation. John recalls the diverse group of people seen in his vision taking part of a worship experience. This worship experience was paying homage to God, also, named El Elyon, the Most High God. The scripture is very cogent that the people worshipping God in this passage all looked different, spoke differently and were not a monolithic group. As a matter of fact, John's vision engenders a well-known scripture in the book of Genesis. The Bible records, “Then God said, Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them,” (Gen. 1:26-27).

To further understand God's creation, there are two words that need to be clarified. Those two words are image and likeness. Because the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, it is important to look at the Hebrew definition. The Hebrew word for image is Tselem (6754).<sup>21</sup> It

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<sup>20</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New King James Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), s.v. "Image."

comes from an unused root word meaning, to shade; a phantom, illusion, resemblance.<sup>22</sup> As for likeness, its Hebrew word is Demuwth (1823). This signifies, shape, figure, form, and pattern. Both words illustrate that God formed mankind after his own pattern. In the Old Testament book of Psalm, King David wrote, "I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are your works, and that my soul knows very well," (Ps. 139:14). As a matter of fact, God "has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth," (Acts 17:26).

Scriptures indicate that the nations of men or mankind descended from Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Genesis chapter ten provides a detailed genealogy of the nation's stemming from these three sons. This genealogy has been dubbed the Table of Nations among some Christian circles. The aforementioned Table of Nations utilizes Noah's three sons to identify mankind's racial groups.<sup>23</sup> Typically the groups are classified as such: Negroid (Ham), Caucasoid (Japheth) and Mongoloid (Shem).<sup>24</sup> Based off these ethnic groups, we know that Ham is the Father of the Black race, Japheth is the Father of the White race and Shem is the Father Arabic/Hebrew individuals.<sup>25</sup>

The Black race or the Hamites have been falsely labeled as a nation who was cursed by God.<sup>26</sup> This mendacity began a perpetual series of horrible and deadly incidents for those of the

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<sup>22</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), s.v. "Image."

<sup>23</sup> Rev. Walter Arthur McCray, *The Black Presence in the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Black Light Fellowship, 2016), 46.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Joel A. Freeman & Don B. Griffin, *Return to Glory* (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 2003), 43.

<sup>26</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, "Original Dishonor: Noah's Curse and the Southern Defense of Slavery." *Journal of Southern Religion* (2000). <http://jsr.fsu.edu/honor.htm>.



Black race. The lies stemmed from false exegesis of the scriptures that dealt with a pronouncement that was made by Noah. According to scripture Noah awoke from a drunken incident and came to realize his son Ham uncovered his nakedness (Gen. 9:24). As a result, Noah said, “Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants He shall be to his brothers,” (Gen. 9:25). This so-called curse of Ham, served as the religious rationale for slavery particularly by antebellum southerners.<sup>27</sup>

The institution of slavery fostered an environment where blacks were degraded, raped, and even killed. Considering this, many black families were separated by the masters who owned them. This resulted in a major breakdown of God’s idea of the family. The families primarily affected by slavery were those individuals with dark skin.<sup>28</sup> That is because Ham’s name means dark or burnt.<sup>29</sup> In view of this, many believers equated dark skin with being inferior. Despite the scripture identifying all of God’s creation as wonderful, many white Christians failed to see that dark skin is beautiful in God’s eyes. Eventually many in the Black race were stripped of their dignity and value at the hands of people who proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Ironically, the message of Christ promotes freedom and not bondage. It was Jesus himself who said, “Therefore if the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed,” (John 8:36). The lack of love and respect for those with dark flesh, would later become detrimental for the larger body of Christ. Case in point, Christianity become known as a ‘white man’s religion.’

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<sup>27</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, “Original Dishonor: Noah’s Curse and the Southern Defense of Slavery.” *Journal of Southern Religion* (2000). <http://jsr.fsu.edu/honor.htm>.

<sup>28</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham*, (Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 15, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>29</sup> Daniel J. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 52.

## Black Race: Alleged Curse of Ham

“So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said: Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants, He shall be to his brethren. And he said: “Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant,” (Gen. 9:24-27).

It is this aforementioned verse that has unfortunately been utilized as a catalyst for keeping blacks enslaved. The ideology of the curse of Ham was seemingly introduced to America by Europeans. Author David Goldenberg writes, “From Europe the curse of Ham came to America, where it is mentioned as early as 1700 in the critique of slavery by Massachusetts Judge Samuel Sewall.”<sup>30</sup> The Encyclopedia Britannica states that Sewall was a British-American colonial merchant and known for his role in the Salem witchcraft trials. As an author he published works with an anti-slavery slant. However not everyone was like him. Others around America and the globe believed whole heartedly in the so-called curse. Author Goldenberg lays out some of those intrinsic beliefs:

The French author and naturalist Jacques Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre: “The Negroes in general are considered as the most unfortunate species of Mankind on the face of the Globe. In truth, it looks as if some destiny had doomed them to slavery. The ancient curse pronounced by Noah is by some believed to be still actually in effect: “Cursed be Canaan! a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.”<sup>31</sup>

Goldenberg also points to James Henry Hammond. He was the Governor of South Carolina and a staunch pro-slavery advocate. In 1836 Hammond gave a speech to the House of Representatives. In this speech Hammond stated that the doom of Ham was branded on the form

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<sup>30</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin/Boston, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 146.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

and features of his African descendants.<sup>32</sup> Hammond also said that the hand of fate has united his color and destiny. Man cannot separate what God hath joined.”<sup>33</sup> Goldenberg does not stop there. To illustrate his point he introduces his readers to Simeon Doggett. Doggett was a pro-slavery Unitarian clergyman from Massachusetts. Doggett believed:

“The purport of Noah’s prophetic denunciation is, that the posterity of Ham would become a degraded, servile race, and eventually fall under the domination of the descendants of his other sons, Shem and Japheth. This extraordinary prediction has been wonderfully verified.”<sup>34</sup>

The alleged curse also carried with it the rationale for the origins of dark skin. Many purport that Ham’s curse brought forth a visible punishment. That punishment was darker skin. Goldenberg outlines a glaring justification for this belief. This one at the hands of a Lithuanian rabbinic scholar Ze’ev Wolf Einhorn. Einhorn states, “Since we see that all of Ham’s descendants are ugly and black, and the Torah says that Ham was cursed with slavery, apparently then the blackness was part of the curse.”<sup>35</sup>

Author Stephen Haynes wrote a book entitled *Noah’s Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*. The book delves into the different viewpoints that equate Ham with blackness. Haynes writes, “Several notorious rabbinic glosses on the biblical text link Ham’s descendants with dark skin and other Negroid features have been identified as wellsprings of

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<sup>32</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin/Boston, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 223.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

antiblack sentiment.”<sup>36</sup> The audacity for some to utilize the Hamitic scripture as a springboard for the degrading of the Black race is unbiblical. King David thanked the Lord that he was fearfully and wonderfully made and that his frame was not hidden from God (Ps. 139:14-15). Similarly, the same is true for all mankind.

As a matter of fact, the Lord told Jeremiah that before he was formed in his mother’s womb, the Lord knew or had a plan for him (Jer. 1:5). By juxtaposing Psalm 139 and Jeremiah 1, there is no way that the Black race derived from a curse. The Bible is cogent that God fashioned his creation based on his image. To indicate that dark flesh is a curse is to say that God Almighty is a cursed deity. God’s image is not a curse as God is perfect in all his ways. Nonetheless bias presented due to the alleged curse paved the way for another negative impact on the Black race. That negative impact was called inferiority.

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines inferior as, ‘of poor quality, low or lower in quality, of less importance or value.’ For decades to come the word inferior would best describe the way of life for many in the Black race. The institution of slavery engendered an evil that bound blacks to inhumane treatment and many times deadly experiences. For blacks their God given appearance made them second class citizens. Sociology professor James Reinhardt published an article entitled *The Negro: Is He a Biological Inferior?* In the article Reinhardt writes in part, “Certainly to the white man in America the Negro appears inferior. He is black; his lips are thick; his nose is broad and low; his hair is kinky.”<sup>37</sup> He goes on to say, “He seems

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 7, Oxford Scholarship Online.

<sup>37</sup> James M. Reinhardt, “The Negro: Is He a Biological Inferior?” *American Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 2 (1927): 249-250. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2766200>.

generally shiftless. His achievements do not loom high in comparison. Besides, there is what appears to be a natural feeling of contempt for him.”<sup>38</sup> The continued abuse and disdain for the Black race resulted in some blacks not living out the basis for the Declaration of Independence. Part of the document states, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”<sup>39</sup>

Albeit that happiness was a nightmare for many in the Black race for decades and still for some today. Pastor and Theologian Dr. Tony Evans summarizes how the alleged curse of Ham inflicted detrimental psychological harm to many in the Black race:

Due to the curse of Ham theory, there now existed a myth of inferiority with apparent biblical roots. This theological basis provided the raw material necessary to convince the slaves that to resist their assigned inferior status was to resist the will of God. This myth became an authoritative one because it was rooted in a purported theology, and slave owners used this twisted belief system to sustain a perverted sociology.<sup>40</sup>

The amount of hatred towards the Black race was uncalled for and it was due in part to a misinterpretation of the scriptures. On the other hand, the black presence in the Bible is so rich that the alleged curse of Ham should have been cut-off at its root. If those who lacked biblical competency understood the accomplishments of black people in the Bible, then they may have

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<sup>38</sup> James M. Reinhardt, “The Negro: Is He a Biological Inferior?” *American Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 2 (1927): 249-250. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2766200>.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas Jefferson, et al, July 4, Copy of Declaration of Independence. -07-04, 1776. Manuscript/Mixed Material. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mtjbib000159/>.

<sup>40</sup> Tony Evans, *Oneness Embraced: Reconciliation, the Kingdom, and How We Are Stronger Together* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2015) 71, ProQuest Ebook Central.

been less likely to propagate a lie. That lie set-off a series of events that forever changed the trajectory of the Black race.

### Black Race: The Cushites

“Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates, (Gen. 2:10-14).

Since the beginning of God’s creation, modern day Africa was associated with rivers connected to the Garden of Eden. The land known as America today was not yet discovered by Native Americans. The above scripture bears witness with four rivers linked with man’s first home. These rivers flowed through land that connected with Africa. Gihon the second river goes around the entire land of Cush. The nation of Cush stretched along the Nile south of Egypt and was referred to by historians in various terms; Nubia, Ta-sety, Wawat, Cush, Meroe, Ethiopia.<sup>41</sup> Hence, the Cushites were known as people belonging to the Black race.

As a civilization, the Cushites were not an obscure group only discovered when Europeans explored Africa.<sup>42</sup> Professor and author Rodney Sadler lays out the blueprint to this fact. Sadler writes, “Cushites were known through Egyptian and Assyrian epigraphy as a dark-skinned people with features consistent with modern notions of negroes.”<sup>43</sup> Sadler also notes that

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<sup>41</sup> Daniel J. Hays, “From the Land of the Bow,” *Bible Review* 14, no. 4 (1998): 50. <https://www-baslibrary-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/bible-review/14/4/20>.

<sup>42</sup> Daniel J. Hayes, “The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 397. <https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001014803&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>43</sup> Rodney S. Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2009), 16, ProQuest Ebook Central.

Cush was known to Greeks as Ethiopian which was defined as burnt face.<sup>44</sup> The outward appearance of the Cushite's paralleled that to their father Ham. The Bible says the sons of Ham were, Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan (Gen. 10:6). The word Ham has been understood to be related to the Hebrew word for black or brown.<sup>45</sup> Thus, a black or brown skin tone makes sense when it comes to the Cushites.

However, for some the Cushites did not signify blackness. Some believe that the other names of Kush's descendants correspond to inhabited areas not in Africa but in the southern and southwestern parts of the Arabian Peninsula.<sup>46</sup> Others cosign to this frame of thought. Author J. Daniel Hays points to the scripture when Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of his Cushite bride (Num. 12:1). Hays indicates, "Many commentators argue that this woman was not a black Cushite, from the country south of Egypt, but rather an Arab-looking Midianite."<sup>47</sup> Another school of thought points to the grandson of Cush to show not all Cushites were dark skinned. Author David Goldenberg explains. He says most scholars feel the Nimrod Kush is associated with the Kassites of Mesopotamia who overthrew the first Babylonian dynasty in 1595 BCE and ruled Babylon for the next 450 years.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Rodney S. Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2009), 17, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>45</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (Princeton University Press, 2005), 143. ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel J. Hayes, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996): 397. <https://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLA0001014803&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

<sup>48</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (Princeton University Press, 2005), 20. ProQuest Ebook Central.

On the contrary, references to Cush as a geographical region, denote the African land on the southern border of ancient Egypt, commonly known today as Nubia.<sup>49</sup> Kevin Burrell is an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Burman University. He specializes in ethnicity in the Hebrew Bible and Cushites of the Bible. Burrell writes, “Based on iconographic and textual evidence, Cushites are typically understood as a sub-Saharan African people. The Egyptians, who knew the Cushites best, consistently depicted them with black skin pigmentation.”<sup>50</sup> Not to mention that Assyrian king Esarhaddon, who fought against Taharqo described Taharqo and the members of his royal family dark as pitch.<sup>51</sup>

Up to this point, suffice it to say the Africa that was connected to the Garden of Eden produced dark and brown skinned individuals. This same Africa would later become home to a number of theologians and philosophers who helped shape Christianity. Simultaneously, this Africa would become the major hub for the selling, killing and raping of millions of people.

### Black Race: The Gospel in Africa

“Go, swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth of skin, to a people terrible from their beginning onward, A nation powerful and treading down, Whose land the rivers divide,” (Isa. 18:2). The prophet Isaiah was instructed by the Lord to make this proclamation to Ethiopia. In his proclamation, the prophet uses the word terrible. Once again because the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, it is better to utilize the original Hebrew wording for clarity. The Hebrew

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<sup>49</sup> Burrell, Kevin. “Epistles: Biblical Profile: Representing Cush in the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, no. 5 (2020): 62. <https://www-baslibrary-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/biblical-archaeology-review/46/5/24>.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.



word for terrible here is “yare.’ This is not simply fear but reverence, whereby an individual recognizes the power and position of the individual revered and renders him proper respect.<sup>52</sup>

The Lord is basically highlighting the fact that this nation is very important.

As previously mentioned, Ethiopia was interchangeable with the word Cush and Cush was a nation stretched along the Nile south of Egypt.<sup>53</sup> Scripture reveals that during the Exodus account that a mixed multitude went up with Moses and the Israelites (Exod. 12:38). This mixed multitude no doubt included the Egyptians (black & brown) who saw how the Israelites God, defeated the Egyptian gods. These individuals thus had firsthand knowledge of Jehovah and his mighty acts!

Moreover, during the first century, Ethiopia was the first kingdom to accept Christianity as its state religion.<sup>54</sup> In his book *The Whitewashing of Christianity*, Jerome Gay outlines the history of Ethiopia. Gay indicates the first 100 years of Christianity reveals churches that were established in Egypt.<sup>55</sup> Ethiopian believers were also making pilgrimages to Jerusalem and establishing military outposts for Christians in surrounding areas.<sup>56</sup> Gay also mentions the monasteries in Ethiopia that empowered one’s spiritual walk with God.<sup>57</sup> Gay explains there were also ample pieces of art depicting Jesus, Abraham, and others with brown complexions. He

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<sup>52</sup> James Strong, *Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2010), s.v. "Yare."

<sup>53</sup> Daniel J. Hays, “From the Land of the Bow,” *Bible Review* 14, no. 4 (1998): 50. <https://www-baslibrary-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/bible-review/14/4/20>.

<sup>54</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

notes that while these images predate European imagery, the art forms never made their way to seminary, scholarly, and historical literature written about early Christianity.<sup>58</sup>

For hundreds of years Christianity has been cloaked in a false pretext that the gospel belonged to Europeans.<sup>59</sup> In their book, *The Color of Christ* authors Edward Blum and Paul Harvey outline the birth of what became known as the image of a white Jesus. The authors explain how his holy whiteness has been used to sanctify racial hierarchies.<sup>60</sup> Correspondingly during the Christian period, the Nubians were known for their great beauty and high moral virtues.<sup>61</sup> Author Jerome Gay goes on to explain that by the fifth century, churches were established in Nubia and by 543 Nubia experienced Christianity that was not influenced by colonization.<sup>62</sup> There was a man by the name of Saint Maurice who demonstrated divine piety. He led 'The Theban Legion' which was a group of soldiers recruited for Rome in Southern Egypt.<sup>63</sup> These African Christian Theban legionnaires suffered martyrdom for refusing to carry out military orders they believed were unconscionable.<sup>64</sup> Even long before the Transatlantic Slave trade, African men exhibited their faith without the help of American missionaries.

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<sup>58</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 107.

<sup>59</sup> Dr. Joel A. Freeman & Don B. Griffin, *Return to Glory* (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 2003), 61.

<sup>60</sup> Edward Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 9, ProQuest Ebook Central.

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Joel A. Freeman & Don B. Griffin, *Return to Glory* (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 2003), 61.

<sup>62</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 80.

<sup>63</sup> Donald F. O'Reilly, "The Theban Legion of St. Maurice." *Vigiliae Christianae* 32, no. 3 (1978): 195 <https://doi.org/10.2307/1582882>

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 195.

In the book entitled *Return to Glory*, authors Dr. Joel Freeman and Don Griffin, explain how the Nubians' faith in Christ cost them their civilization. They write those who were Muslim began a campaign to eradicate the biblical influence that Nubia had. Threats and speeches could not do it alone, it took thousands of years of bloody persecution to remove the Nubian church.<sup>65</sup> It is important to realize that Christianity existed hundreds of years before Islam and that Africa sent the first Christian missionaries to Europe.<sup>66</sup>

Some of the early church theologians were from Africa. Tertullian was from Carthage in Northern Africa. Based on early church history, Tertullian is known as an apologist and a dynamic writer. He is most celebrated for being the first person to use the term Trinity to describe the Godhead.<sup>67</sup> This theological feat paved the way for many to understand how the Father, Son & Holy Spirit are one. The Bible states that, "For in Him {Christ} dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you are complete in him," (Col. 2:9). Furthermore, the rules and methods for interpreting scripture not only came from Africa's greatest scientific investigator of sacred texts, Origen, but also by fourth and fifth-century African exegetes like Didymus the Blind, Tyconius and Augustine of Hippo.<sup>68</sup>

Thomas Oden is the author of *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind*. He goes on to show how Africans made extraordinary advances for Christian literature and thought. He states, "The perplexing relation of the Old and New Testaments was studied with great philological

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<sup>65</sup> Dr. Joel A. Freeman & Don B. Griffin, *Return to Glory* (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 2003), 61.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>67</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 110.

<sup>68</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 45.

precision by Christians from Africa of the first three Christian centuries. These patterns of interpretation became decisive for later studies in Syriac, Greek and Latin, and much later in German, French and English exegesis.”<sup>69</sup>

Speaking of Philosophical greats, in comes Athanasius. Athanasius was the Bishop of Alexandria and is most notably known for his defense of the faith at the Council of Nicea.<sup>70</sup> *Against the Heathen* is one of his more prominent pieces of literature, which serves as a writing that highlights Yeshua’s imminence while rejecting the idea of deism.<sup>71</sup> Another key point of Athanasius is that he is known as the black dwarf because of his dark skin and short stature.<sup>72</sup> Once again an African man charted the way for Christians to solidify what they believe. Likewise, author Thomas Oden further explains the spiritual and academic prowess that was birthed in Africa. Oden writes, “Africa had a major hand in crafting the basic Latin and Greek views of sin and grace, creation and providence, atonement, eschatology, baptism and the life of prayer.”<sup>73</sup>

All in all, Christianity was already a way of life in Africa. The gospel traveled during New Testament time, the gospel no doubt also traveled throughout the nation. With no modern-day transportation and technology, its highly probable that not all people in Africa heard about Jesus. Nonetheless, Africa’s role in Christianity should not be overlooked. The disregard for the

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 45.

<sup>70</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 122.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 60.

proper attribution to Africa in seminaries and academic settings may have contributed to the ideology that dark skinned people are inferior.

### Black Race: Hamitic Scriptures Exegeted

It is time now to take an exegetical look at the verse that contains the so-called curse of Ham. The claim for hundreds of years is that the Black race was cursed because of Ham. The scripture in question reads:

“So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said: Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants, He shall be to his brethren. And he said: “Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant,” (Gen. 9:24-27).

While analyzing this scripture it denotes that Noah uttered a curse towards Canaan and not Ham. There is no ambiguity about who Noah is speaking to or about. When it comes to biblical interpretation, the notion of higher criticism seeks to understand what the text of the Bible originally meant.<sup>74</sup> Based on the central scripture at hand, this is a lucid account of judgment being pronounced on the nation of Canaan.

Moses is the writer of the book of Genesis. As a matter of fact, Moses is the writer of the Pentateuch the first five books of the Old Testament. Moses clearly states, “Cursed be Canaan.” The Bible does not indicate why Noah cursed Canaan and not Ham who committed the vile act. Nevertheless, the descendants of Canaan were marked to be beneath their own brothers. This

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<sup>74</sup> Steven B. Cowan and Terry L. Wilder, *In Defense of the Bible: A Comprehensive Apologetic for the Authority of Scripture* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2013), lix.

story is somewhat reminiscent of Joseph's brothers having to bow down to him based on his dreams. From the verse, it shows that the Canaanites would be subjected to Shem and Japheth. Nowhere in this verse is there a mention that skin color brought on this curse. The actions that resulted in the pronouncement being made by Noah was due to the uncovering of nakedness.

Furthermore, the scriptures say that God would enlarge Japheth and that Japheth would dwell in the tents of his brother Shem. Nowhere, in these three key verses did Moses infer that due to black skin Ham uncovered his father's nakedness. Plus, Moses never indicated that dark skinned people were prone to ungodly behavior. What Ham did was an isolated case, and the Bible does not conclude those who were dark skinned would follow in Ham's footsteps. Arguably, no other sacred text in Christianity, Islam, or Judaism has been misused and abused in the interest of racism more than the curse of Ham.<sup>75</sup> The question now becomes, how did the alleged curse of Ham become the equation to justify inhumane treatment toward the Black race? Unfortunately, the issue at hand is way more nuanced.

Dr. Jamal-Dominique Hopkins is the Dean at The Dickerson-Green Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. Dr. Hopkins pens an extensive look at how Rabbinic Literature would later misconstrue the proper interpretation of the Noahic curse. Dr. Hopkins indicates it is possible that rabbinic literature reflects the aggadic midrash.<sup>76</sup> The aggadic midrash is an ancient rabbinic interpretation of scripture. It is more imaginative in its attempts to fill in

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<sup>75</sup> Wongi Park, "The Blessing of Whiteness in the Curse of Ham: Reading Gen 9:18–29 in the Antebellum South." *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 928, DOI:10.3390/rel12110928.

<sup>76</sup> Jamal-Dominique Hopkins, "The Noahic Curse in Rabbinic Literature: Racialized Hermeneutics or Ethnocentric Exegesis" in *Re-Presenting Texts: Jewish and Black Biblical Interpretation*, ed. W. David Nelson and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 19.

the gaps in scripture.<sup>77</sup> Dr. Hopkins adds this kind of interpretation was meant to answer discrepancies and unanswered questions surrounding a biblical account. Hopkins says perhaps the issues related to Ham and blackness spoke to an element of ethnocentric rabbinic interests rooted in racism.<sup>78</sup>

To this point, author David Goldenberg brings to light one school of thought. Goldenberg speaks about rabbinic legends and explains how the idea of skin color was born in the ghetto of the feverish and sadistic imagination of some rabbis.<sup>79</sup> These ideas would soon find their way across the globe. In his article entitled the "The Noahic Curse in Rabbinic Literature: Racialized Hermeneutics or Ethnocentric Exegesis, Dr. Hopkins highlights the work of Charles B. Copher. Copher was a Hebrew Bible Scholar and former Dean at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. Dr. Hopkins explains that Copher's work speaks to dark-skinned people in midrashic literature from 200 to 500 CE. Copher further extends a commentary that is not supported by the original Scripture that contains the Noahic curse:

Moreover, because you twisted your head around to see my nakedness, your grandchildren's hair shall be twisted into kinks, and their eyes, red, again, because your lips jested at my misfortunate, theirs shall swell; and because you neglected my nakedness, they shall go naked and their male members shall be shamefully elongated.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Jamal-Dominique Hopkins, "The Noahic Curse in Rabbinic Literature: Racialized Hermeneutics or Ethnocentric Exegesis" in *Re-Presenting Texts: Jewish and Black Biblical Interpretation*, ed. W. David Nelson and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>79</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin/Boston, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017), 18.

<sup>80</sup> Jamal-Dominique Hopkins, "The Noahic Curse in Rabbinic Literature: Racialized Hermeneutics or Ethnocentric Exegesis" in *Re-Presenting Texts: Jewish and Black Biblical Interpretation*, ed. W. David Nelson and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 21.

It does not take an experienced Biblical scholar to understand that the original meaning of the scripture has been taken completely out of context. In his book entitled *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham*, Author David Goldenberg offers support to the false interpretation of the curse. Goldenberg outlines a writing about Albert Barnes a presbyterian minister. Barnes is noted as saying “This passage, by a singular perverseness of interpretation, and a singular perseverance in that perverseness notwithstanding the plainest rules of exegesis, is often employed to justify the reduction of the African to slavery.”<sup>81</sup>

Further Jewish literature showcased the link between the false interpretation of the curse. Dr. Hopkins points out, “re-envisioning Gen 9:18-27 as a curse upon Ham and all of his progeny, not just Canaan, thus damming all the communities that would arise from this lineage.”<sup>82</sup> Hopkins goes on to say this sociological stratification is what caused part of the problem at hand. He also mentioned that pro-slavery hermeneutical readings from 19<sup>th</sup> century rabbis conflated the issue even more. Unfortunately, various teachings about the curse became the rule of law despite the clear verbiage from the Bible. If there are further studies into scripture, one would see that the curse which was directed toward Canaan and it actually came to pass. In the book of Deuteronomy Moses told the Israelites that the land of Canaan would be given to them by the Lord. “When the Lord your God delivers them over to you, you shall conquer them and utterly

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<sup>81</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *Black and Slave: The Origins and History of the Curse of Ham* (Berlin/Boston, Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2017),16.

<sup>82</sup> Jamal-Dominique Hopkins, "The Noahic Curse in Rabbinic Literature: Racialized Hermeneutics or Ethnocentric Exegesis" in *Re-Presenting Texts: Jewish and Black Biblical Interpretation*, ed. W. David Nelson and Rivka Ulmer (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 21.



destroy them,” (Deut. 7:2). All in all, the curse of Ham myth legitimized and validated the social order by so-called divine justification, no matter how irrational or circular, the arguments were.<sup>83</sup>

### Black Race: Black Presence in the Bible

The idea that blacks should be subjected to a lifetime of slavery due to a misinterpretation of the Noahic curse, is like saying all Jews should be held in exile because they did not obey the command of the Lord. However, scriptures indicate that disobedience can cause captivity and exile. Case in point after the prophecy from Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar took the Jews into captivity, and this is where Daniel and the three Hebrew boys are introduced. However, that was not God’s intent to keep his chosen people bond for centuries. Being that the focus of this paper deals with the Black race, if one espoused that blacks should be bond for their complete lifetimes several scriptures debunk that ideology. As was previously mentioned the prophet Isaiah prophesied to the nation of Ethiopia in Isaiah chapter eighteen. As a nation with dark-skinned people, the scriptures reveal them to be powerful and that people were to have reverence for them.

Standing in awe or showing reverence denotes a person or group of high standing. It is similar to being captivated by Queen Elizabeth II when she walks down the streets of London or when the President of the United States enters a room. The mere position they hold speaks volumes. Likewise, the Ethiopians were to be respected and placed in high regard. This scripture brings to light the success of a nation of dark-skinned individuals. Based on the false exegesis of the Noahic curse these Ethiopians should be slaves. Slaves are not people that are looked upon

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<sup>83</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (Princeton University Press, 2005), 177.

with praise and admiration. Slaves are deemed the lowest of society. During the Transatlantic Slave Trade, brown and dark-skinned people were kidnapped from their homes and sent to live a life of involuntary servitude.

Conversely, the Bible records the achievements and successes of the so called cursed Black race. One of the celebrated dark-skinned individuals in the Old Testament is Nimrod. The Bible classifies Nimrod as a mighty hunter before the Lord. From this passage one can infer that Nimrod knew of the God of his great-great grandfather Noah. Nimrod's father was Cush. As previously stated, the Cushites were known to the Greeks as having burnt faces. From his lineage it is understood that Nimrod is a black man. Nimrod is credited with building several kingdoms. He built Babel, Erech, Nineveh, Rehoboth and Calneh just to name a few (Gen. 10:10-12). It takes a certain level of ingenuity to establish several kingdoms. Nimrod had to possess intelligence in construction, transportation, education, and government to have successfully produced several cities. This is no small matter for someone that had only a slave's intelligence could never have been able to formulate and achieve such managerial skill to construct and administer several kingdoms.

Moreover, the Old Testament details the account of yet another key individual derived from the Cushites. His name is Phinehas and he would later be engrafted into the royal priesthood. Author Daniel Hays breaks down the etymology of the word Phinehas. Hays shows that Phinehas is an Egyptian loan word and the 'ph' pre fix functions in a fashion similar to a definite article.<sup>84</sup> He goes on to show that Phinehas' name translates as the Negro, the Nubian or the Cushite.<sup>85</sup> The story of Phinehas kicks into gear in Numbers chapter 25. The chapter details

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel J. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 82.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

the Israelites were engaging in sexual immorality with the women of Moab. The Lord's anger burned against them due to this idolatry. In order to stop the anger of the Lord from destroying the Israelites, Phinehas himself killed some of the individuals who were continuing in sexual immorality. Due to his actions the Lord spoke to Moses saying, "Behold, I give him My covenant of peace and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God and made atonement for the children of Israel," (Num. 25: 12-13).

Another dark-skinned individual in the Bible who needs to be mentioned is Ebedmelech the Ethiopian. Little is known about him but what is known speaks volume. Ebedmelech is introduced in the Old Testament book of Jeremiah. According to Jeremiah chapter 38, Ebedmelech is a eunuch assigned to the house of King Zedekiah. He spoke to the king on Jeremiah's behalf so that the prophet would not die from hunger in a dungeon. The chapter reveals that the king listened to Ebedmelech and told the Ethiopian to take thirty men with him to rescue Jeremiah from the dungeon. This Biblical account shows how someone from the lineage of Cush worked alongside a king. Not everyone had the opportunity to be in the king's house! Not only was he in the king's house but the king listened to Ebedmelech's counsel thus saving the life of prophet Jeremiah. Again, here the Bible shows how someone black was instrumental to the scriptures. They are not dismissed as someone who was supposed to be inferior or a slave.

Similarly, there is a well-known Ethiopian in the New Testament. The Bible does not give him a name, just that he was a eunuch. Acts chapter eight explains that he is a man of great authority serving Candace queen of the Ethiopians and that he oversaw her treasury. The Bible also points out that he was going to Jerusalem to worship. Going to worship meant this eunuch

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already had knowledge of El Elyon and knew the God of the Old Testament. The eunuch was reading the prophet Isaiah and needed Philip to interpret the scriptures for him. This Biblical account debunks the false narrative that Africans did not know about God and that Christianity is a white man's religion. Based on this account that is impossible.

The book of Acts was written about AD 63 or later. That means Philip's interaction with the eunuch happened years before Acts was written. It was not until the 1670s during the Transatlantic Slave Trade, that individuals from Africa become enslaved in America.<sup>86</sup> During this time many professing Christians thrust the will of God into the evil institution of slavery. Some used this wicked practice as the vehicle to teach enslaved individuals about the Bible. Based on calculations the slave trade began thousands of years after the book of Acts was written. Being that the Ethiopian eunuch had the Scriptures thousands of years before America was established, there is no way Christianity could be a white man's religion.

Notably the church at Antioch had at least two individuals from African descent who were leaders. The Bible says, "Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul (Acts 13:1-2). Niger is the Latin word for black. Although the Apostle Luke does not go into detail about Simeon's origins, many scholars believe he came from Africa.<sup>87</sup> Author Daniel Hays says mentioning Simeon shows that Black Africans were part of the Christian Church, and this cancels the argument that Christianity only came to Black Africa through slavery and European exploitation.<sup>88</sup> Hays adds that Black Africans from

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<sup>86</sup> Kenneth Chelst, *Exodus and Emancipation: Biblical and African-American Slavery* (Urim Publications, 2009), 55.

<sup>87</sup> Daniel J. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 177.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 178.

Cush/Ethiopia/Meroe were present throughout the ancient world during the entire biblical period. Black Africans served as auxiliaries in the Roman army, so it would not be unusual to find a Black African in a cosmopolitan city such as Antioch during the first century.<sup>89</sup> Lucius of Cyrene is also listed as one of the prophet/church leaders. Cyrene is in Africa. So once again, there is proof that someone from African descent, already had the gospel of Jesus Christ.

These are just some examples that illustrate the achievements of dark-skinned people in the Bible and their devotion to the Lord. As was mentioned in chapter one everyone including the Black race was made in God's image and likeness. These first two chapters speak on the power and might of the Black race. Once again, the Isaiah prophet says they are a powerful nation and people to be feared (Isa. 18:2). In no way was this race made to be subjected to inhumane and deadly incidents at times all in the name of God.

After all, if some early Christian ministers knew about the biblical achievements of dark-skinned people in the Bible and their strength, it is probable many believers would have rejected the falsehood of the curse of Ham. To this point author Daniel Hays concludes if early Americans would have read that God made an eternal covenant with a Negro called Phinehas, it would have been extremely difficult to uphold the falsehood of the Noahic curse.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Daniel J. Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (InterVarsity Press, 2003), 178.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

## Slavery: Imprisoned

The institution of slavery in America was a far cry from the servitude described in the scriptures. Unfortunately, the documentation of slaves and servants in the Bible were weaponized for personal gain. That personal gain was all about economics and control. To better understand this, one must dig a little deeper into the origins of slavery. Before the first African made it to the shores of the original colonies, many people throughout the world participated in some form of slavery. Dublin for instance was Europe's largest slave market during the eleventh century.<sup>91</sup> The Romans who once controlled England, trafficked in hundreds of thousands of slaves each year.<sup>92</sup>

Gerald Horne is the author of *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism*. He writes, "by 1441, Portuguese pirates had seized Africans for sale and by 1470 Spaniards had begun to do the same. It was in 1482 that Portugal began construction of a large fort to facilitate trade in Africans."<sup>93</sup> With that the Portuguese had established the first major Atlantic slave trade systems, moving Africans to Europe, the Atlantic islands and then the Americas.<sup>94</sup> Speaking of the America's after Christopher Columbus sailed the ocean blue, he already found a land inhabited with Native Americans. He eventually sent four boatloads of indigenes to Mediterranean slave markets.<sup>95</sup> Horne adds that the English, French, Dutch, and Portuguese all followed in

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<sup>91</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in 17th Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 21.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>94</sup> James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 6.

<sup>95</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in 17th Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 21.

Columbus' footsteps.<sup>96</sup> As the Europeans catapulted into the slave trade the Mayans, Aztecs, and Indians had control over products the Europeans craved.<sup>97</sup> However their civilizations fell not just by the sword but by disease and sickness transmitted unknowingly by the Europeans.<sup>98</sup> Eventually Europeans started families, they established towns and began raising crops which in turn meant more raw materials from their colonies.<sup>99</sup> Author Jemar Tisby wrote *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism*. In it he outlines a backdrop to slavery and its rise among nations. Tisby wrote, "to meet the growing European demands, the North American colonizers increasingly turned to slavery."<sup>100</sup>

As a matter of fact, the period between 1550 and 1580 saw a rapid expansion in the trade of enslaved individuals from Africa to the Americas.<sup>101</sup> Throughout this period, Western Africa remained the dominant source of American-bound slaves.<sup>102</sup> Still, Africans were not going without a fight. At one point the Portuguese were at war in West Africa resulting in three hundred of these invaders being killed in 1570.<sup>103</sup> Horne describes how some Africans dealt with their invaders. He says, "The Africans had gathered in the forest and watched carefully as

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<sup>96</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in 17th Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 21.

<sup>97</sup> James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 2.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>99</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019), 29.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>101</sup> Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 208.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>103</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in 17th Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 23.

these invaders decamped before killing them all. On another occasion they severed the invaders' heads from their bodies, leaving their bodies on the beach, then placed their skulls on wooden stakes."<sup>104</sup> As a result the Europeans had to figure out ways to sweeten the deal for business purposes. The Europeans offered incentives such as land grants in the Americas to individuals who could capture these Africans because they were a strong group.<sup>105</sup> Author Toby Green wrote *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa*. Green breaks down how others dealt with the violent attacks by Africans. Green says, "The expanding cycle of demand in the Americas therefore initially had the most impact among the peoples of Upper Guinea, as new strategies were developed both to procure slaves in this region and for defense against predatory attacks by slave raiders."<sup>106</sup>

The enslavement of Africans took a dramatic turn when a group of 20 negroes were brought to the shores of Virginia in 1619.<sup>107</sup> This voyage set the stage for Africans to be kidnapped, shackled, and imported into the Americas for years to come. The following years the number of enslaved blacks rose to the thousands. This was made possible by the budding tobacco industry. Author James Walvin explains this expansion. He writes, "But the numbers increased as tobacco expanded, though the local plantations rarely matched the size of their sugar counterparts in the Caribbean: slaves imported into Maryland and Virginia between 1700 and

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<sup>104</sup> Gerald Horne, *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism: The Roots of Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism in 17th Century North America and the Caribbean* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2018), 23.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>106</sup> Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 208.

<sup>107</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019), 23.



1740 numbered 54,000.”<sup>108</sup> Here’s a breakdown of the tobacco explosion. American tobacco imported by England rose from 2,500 pounds in 1616 to a peak of 105 million pounds by 1771 and the cultivation took about half a year.<sup>109</sup>

Tobacco was just the beginning. A new crop came into the picture and with that more Africans were kidnapped from their homeland. That new crop was rice. This time Virginia was not the only state benefiting from the ills of slavery. From here South Carolina came into the picture. Walvin says, “Right up to independence from Britain in 1776, slaves were in a majority in South Carolina. Slavery quickly proved itself as the most obvious and viable of institutions, brushing aside any local moral objections.”<sup>110</sup> He goes on to say that as the rice economy thrived it was centered around Charleston. During this time slaves were a hot commodity, and they were being shipped in nonstop. Rice quickly established itself as a major export crop after tobacco, sugar, and wheat.<sup>111</sup>

In addition to rice, tobacco, sugar and wheat, it was cotton that became the image tied so heavily to American slavery. After U.S. independence, when cotton became the staple crop in the South, the use of blacks for field hands grew more widespread and much more vicious.<sup>112</sup> Jeffrey Russell’s work was featured in the *Christian Research Journal*. He says, “household slaves were sometimes treated well, field laborers were dehumanized as engine parts of the vast

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<sup>108</sup> James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 11.

<sup>109</sup> James Rawley & Stephen Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History, Revised Edition* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 265.

<sup>110</sup> James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 13.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>112</sup> Jeffrey B. Russell, “Christianity and Black Slavery,” *Christian Research Journal*, Volume 36, no.1 (2013): 4.

industrial machine needed to grow and sell cotton profitably.”<sup>113</sup> He adds that by 1790 there were more than 292,000 slaves in Virginia and more than 694,000 in the nation.<sup>114</sup> With slavery making its mark on American soil, the institution helped to shape imperial policy, shape American agricultural development, patterns of trade, credit, and the growth of political discontent.<sup>115</sup>

Despite the perceived financial success of slavery from white slave owners, this institution dehumanized, devalued, and in some cases killed those of African descent. Winthrop Jordan authored the book entitled *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro*. The book details an array of disturbing facts surrounding the treatment of the enslaved. For instance, in the seventeenth century, Negroes were treated more like property, were sent to the fields at a younger age and were denied any existence as inherent members of the community.<sup>116</sup> This was just the beginning of unspeakable harm that enslaved individuals were getting ready to experience. South Carolina was a major breeding ground for the establishment of slavery. A portion of the South Carolina code made it clear that the enslaved, now called Negroes because of their dark flesh, were less than human. It read:

WHEREAS, the plantations and estates of this Province cannot be well and sufficiently managed and brought into use, without the labor and service of negroes and other slaves; and forasmuch as the said negroes and other slaves brought unto the people of the Province for that purpose, are of barbarous, wild, savage natures, and such as renders

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<sup>113</sup> Jeffrey B. Russell, “Christianity and Black Slavery,” *Christian Research Journal*, Volume 36, no.1 (2013): 4.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*,4.

<sup>115</sup> James Rawley & Stephen Behrendt, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History, Revised Edition* (University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 264.

<sup>116</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2012), 82.

them wholly unqualified to be governed by the laws, customs, and practices of this Province.<sup>117</sup>

In order to secure a return on their investment, owners of enslaved individuals were given laws or slave codes. These codes protected the owners more than the enslaved. Jordan writes, “Slaves were forbidden to wander off their plantation without a "ticket" from their master or overseer. They were never to be allowed to congregate in large numbers, carry clubs or arms, or strike a white person.”<sup>118</sup> Jordan does not stop there. He describes the policing of those enslaved. Jordan explains that all white people were authorized to apprehend any Negro unable to give a satisfactory account of himself. Also in areas with a heavy slave concentration, white men were required to serve in the slave "patrols" which were supposed to protect the community.<sup>119</sup>

In the same fashion, enslaved people were not respected as full citizens let alone human beings. A Maryland act of 1681 described marriages of white women with Negroes in part as lustful desires and a disgrace.<sup>120</sup> Several laws across the southern states made sure enslaved people did not get fair treatment. Notably Virginia law set Negroes apart from all other groups by denying them the important right and obligation to bear arms.<sup>121</sup> Further down the line the very documents that formed the United States did not give enslaved people or Negroes any protections.

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<sup>117</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2012), 109.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

The very Constitution of the United States of America has a portion under article one, section two known as the “Three-Fifths Clause.” The clause reads as follows:

Representatives and direct Taxes shall be apportioned among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.<sup>122</sup>

In a nutshell it means that those who were not free people, were only be counted as 3/5’s of a person for establishing congressional representation. Although the word slave, enslaved or Negro does not appear in the clause, the wording engenders the notion of those in bondage.

Sexual assault was also a major problem within the institution of slavery. Shockingly many males were the victims of it as well. Depending on the muscular attributes of the Negro, he would be forced to have sex with another female to produce healthy and strong offspring. Most scholars identify the early nineteenth century as the period of greatest expansion of this practice known as forced coupling.<sup>123</sup>

Thomas Foster is the author of *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*. Foster focuses on Rufus a man enslaved in Texas who was forced to procreate with a woman named Rose. Rose gave details of the life of Rufus during the twentieth century with a representative of the Federal Works Progress Administration. Like Rufus many enslaved men had no say in the matter. Foster highlights the work on one historian named Thelma Jennings. Jennings concluded, “The white patriarch had the power to force them to mate with whomever

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<sup>122</sup> “Proportional Representation,” History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives, <https://history.house.gov/Institution/Origins-Development/Proportional-Representation/>.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 50.

he chose, to reproduce or suffer the consequences, to limit the time spent with their children, and even to sell them and their children.”<sup>124</sup>

A similar story was told through the eyes of another enslaved individual. The National Humanities Center compiled a treasure trove of sexual abuse encounters from enslaved groups:

[Interviewer’s summary] On this plantation were more than 100 slaves who were mated indiscriminately and without any regard for family unions. If their master thought that a certain man and woman might have strong, healthy offspring, he forced them to have sexual relation, even though they were married to other slaves. If there seemed to be any slight reluctance on the part of either of the unfortunate ones, “Big Jim” would make them consummate this relationship in his presence. He used the same procedure if he thought a certain couple was not producing children fast enough. He enjoyed these orgies very much and often entertained his friends in this manner.<sup>125</sup>

However, the sexual assault did not stop there. Some enslaved men were raped by their masters. Many times, this act was performed in front of the community of those enslaved. As a form of punishment, the slave would be stripped naked and beaten severely. The beating would weaken the enslaved so that he would not be able to resist the rape that followed. This violation became known as buck breaking.<sup>126</sup> With this in mind, many punishments directed at enslaved men often had a sexual connotation to it. Masters and overseers would often strip men nude, contributing to the sexually abusive and invasive nature of the punishment.<sup>127</sup> Foster says that beatings for Anglo - Americans was often associated with eroticism and sexualized violence.<sup>128</sup> Foster points

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<sup>124</sup> Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 50.

<sup>125</sup> National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox, “On the Masters’ Sexual Abuse of Slaves Selections from 19th- 20th-century Slave Narratives,” *The Making of African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500-1865* (2009)

<sup>126</sup> Annet Matebwe (JustAnnet), Buck Breaking: The Use of Sexual Violence Against Men as Punishment for Wrongdoing,” History of Yesterday, November 28, 2020, <https://historyofyesterday.com/buck-breaking-the-use-of-sexual-violence-against-enslaved-men-as-punishment-for-wrongdoing-897647489732>.

<sup>127</sup> Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 101.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

to the research of Colette Colligan. The research explains that the beatings served as a function of the combined stimulation to the genital area and public exposure of genitals and buttocks.<sup>129</sup> Throughout the course of time more accounts like these surfaced. The *Journal of the History of Sexuality* details another encounter of sexual assault. A slave named Itanoko was subjected to rape by a white slaver named Urban.<sup>130</sup> Urban was described as a "ravisher" who, Itanoko explained, was "struck by my comeliness," and he did violate, what is most sacred among men.<sup>131</sup>

The sexual abuse was no doubt tied to extreme physical abuse. There are countless records of enslaved individuals who tried to run away. Some of them got away others were not so fortunate. Foster details an experience in his book by a man named Aaron. "A bricklayer, a neighbor of ours, owned a very smart young negro man, who ran away, but was caught. When his master got him home, he stripped him naked, tied him up by his hands, in plain sight and hearing of the academy and the public green."<sup>132</sup> For many who were enslaved the sexual and physical abuse were used to emasculate the man. Foster accounts another story. "On one occasion I saw my brother Ephraim tied up and blindfolded with his own shirt, and beaten with fifty lashes before his own wife and children, by a wretch named Sam Cooper, because he was falsely accused of having stolen a yard of bagging."<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 101.

<sup>130</sup> Thomas A. Foster, "The Sexual Abuse of Black Men Under American Slavery." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 20.3 (2011): [https://bi-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/global/article/GALE%7CA268550584?u=vic\\_liberty&sid=summon](https://bi-gale-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/global/article/GALE%7CA268550584?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Thomas A. Foster, *Rethinking Rufus: Sexual Violations of Enslaved Men*, (University of Georgia Press, 2019), 24.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 24.

If the above-mentioned atrocities were not wicked and evil enough, laws were even implemented that tried to weaken the power of the Bible. Close to the end of the seventeenth century, Maryland, New York, Virginia, North and South Carolina, and New Jersey had all passed laws. Those laws reassured masters that conversion of their slaves did not necessitate manumission.<sup>134</sup> According to Merriam Websters dictionary manumission comes from the verb ‘manumit’ which means to release from slavery. The Bible is clear that, “therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed,” (John 8:36). There is no law or precedent that supersedes the law and freedom of God. Restricted laws like the one previously stated was at odds with Christians who wanted to uphold the truth of scriptures.

The Bible records that “there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male or female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus,” (Gal. 3:28). But to many the slave was not free. That person was a beast dealing with the Noahic curse. Slaves were infidels or heathens and by every count, Negroes qualified to be either one of those.<sup>135</sup> This ideology was in stark contrast to the essence of the scriptures. To make matters worse, those enslaved who came to know Christ were not given the status of a Christian. Furthermore, masters made decisions for the enslaved and their religious condition had no relevance to his status as a slave.<sup>136</sup>

All in all, the wicked and inhumane treatment of enslaved people was night and day from biblical servitude. Many have looked at what was considered slavery in the Bible to bring credence to the evil institution of slavery in America. It is important to realize that biblical servitude and American slavery can never share any likeness or be considered one in the same.

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<sup>134</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2012), 56.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 56

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 93.

## Slavery: Biblical Servitude

“This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, after King Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem to proclaim liberty to them: that every man should set free his male and female slave a Hebrew man or woman that no one should keep a Jewish brother in bondage,” (Jer. 34:8-9). The Lord God was very clear about one thing in Scriptures and that was freedom. For this reason, Jesus Christ came to deliver those who are lost from the bondage of sin. Bondage of any kind does not reflect the resurrected power of Jesus Christ. Throughout Scriptures, there are countless accounts of servitude and in some cases the mention of slavery. The word slavery is so drenched in death, blood and destruction, that the mere appearance of it in the Bible might cause consternation. That is because of the inhumane treatment associated with the word slavery. The transatlantic slave trade transported more than ten million Africans to the Americas and the human cost in terms of suffering, indignity, and death caused by this commerce can never be fully comprehended.<sup>137</sup> In contrast Biblical slavery or servitude does not even touch the surface of the evil institution of slavery.

One of the first mentions of Biblical servants appears in the fourteen chapter of Genesis. The passage indicates that Lot, Abram’s nephew was taken during an attack by several kings. Abram hears about the incident and the Bible says, “he armed his three hundred and eighteen trained servants who were born in his own house and went in pursuit as far as Dan,” (Gen. 14:14). Abram musters his servants and takes back his nephew Lot. This account shows that not only were servants treated like family, but their master also taught them how to fight. Their every own master Abram had an experience with God and his name was changed to Abraham. Years

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<sup>137</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019), 29.



later it was time to find a bride for his son Isaac. The Bible says Abraham selected his oldest servant who ruled over all he had, to go out and find a wife for Isaac. The Bible recorded that “the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and swore to him concerning this matter,” (Gen. 24:9). Once again there is a servant who is treated fairly and is part of his master’s family.

The Book of Exodus outlines a major difference in the way servants are treated. Chapter one introduces the reader to a king who knew nothing about the Israelites, except the fact that they were a great multitude. The king came up with a wicked plan. He said, “come let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply and it happen, in the vent of what that they also join our enemies and fight against us,” (Exod. 1:10). The Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor and made their lives bitter with hard bondage (Exod. 1:14). This continued for hundreds of years until the Lord said enough was enough. God ordained Moses as the human deliver who would lead the Israelites to freedom. Moses empowered the Israelites reassuring them to, “Remember this day in which you went out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out of this place,” (Exod. 13:3).

The Bible stresses the humane treatment that a servant or slave should receive. There are laws stipulating that a person who falls into this category are protected by God’s moral code. For starters someone could not treat the Israelites as slaves:

“And if one of your brethren who dwells by you becomes poor, and sells himself to you, you shall not compel him to serve as a slave. As a hired servant and a sojourner he shall be with you, and shall serve you until the Year of Jubilee. And then he shall depart from you he and his children with him and shall return to his own family. He shall return to the possession of his fathers. For they are My servants, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt; they shall not be sold as slaves. You shall not rule over him with rigor, but you shall fear your God,” (Lev. 25:39-43).

Based off this scripture it was clear that a slave had to be a hired hand. A hired hand meaning someone who was compensated for their work. Another factor was that slavery was not perpetual. That hired hand was to be released at the Year of Jubilee. This meant that slavery was not a lifetime occurrence. God created mankind to be free, so the notion of bondage infuriates the Lord. His word declares, “Out of my distress I called on the Lord; the Lord answered me and set me free,” (Ps. 118:5). But being free is what Satan hates the most. The Bible teaches that his primary purpose now is to steal, kill and destroy them. This is akin to what happened during America’s institution of slavery. Masters stole, killed and destroyed the lives of countless blacks. Again, the Negroes were considered beasts.<sup>138</sup> Black was dirty, sinful and impure.<sup>139</sup> Therefore anything impure was treated. The Bible outlines the rules governing slavery of Israelites:

“If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you and serves you six years, then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you send him away free from you, you shall not let him go away empty-handed; you shall supply him liberally from your flock, from your threshing floor, and from your winepress. From what the LORD your God has blessed you with, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this thing today,” (Deut. 15:12-15).

However, what about those individuals who were not Hebrew? Just because they were not Israelites that did not mean there was a free pass for them to be mistreated. Scripture records ample evidence showing this. For instance, “He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death,” (Exod. 21:16). This is in stark contrast to what many slave traders did. During the Transatlantic Slave Trade for instance, Africans were kidnapped from their homes and brought to a foreign land to serve as enslaved people. Another

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<sup>138</sup> Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro* (Omohundro Institute of Early American History & Culture, 2012), 56.

<sup>139</sup> James Walvin, *Questioning Slavery* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1996), 16.

scripture lays out the penalty for abuse. “And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished,” (Exod. 21:20). This same chapter in Exodus indicates, “If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth,” (Exod. 21:26-27).

Over in Leviticus it states that if a sojourner acquires a slave, eventually that person would have to be released. The law states, “Thus he shall reckon with him who bought him: The price of his release shall be according to the number of years, from the year that he was sold to him until the Year of Jubilee,” (Lev. 25:50). The Year of Jubilee was a turning point for those enslaved or servants. It meant that you were a person and that your life was not predicated on being enslaved. During the Year of Jubilee an individual was granted benefits tied to freedom. That is something the American institution of slavery neglected. During Jubilee, individuals could return to their families, eat the produce of the land and would no longer be oppressed (Lev. 25). Moreover, the Lord commanded his blessing to be with that person and they could redeem property. All in all, this celebration demonstrated that no one was inferior even if they were at one time a servant or enslaved. These are just some of the Biblical laws protecting the humanity of someone considered a slave.

Slave trading communities were also banned by the Word of the Lord. During the Transatlantic Slave Trade, American states along the east coast had plenty of trading posts. As a matter of fact, officials in Charleston, SC preserved a location where people were put up for auction. This preserved auction block is part of a historical tour that shows firsthand where human bodies were sold like chattel. The Bible speaks of judgement against nations that practice this behavior. Major punishment came to a particular nation in the book of Amos. The Bible

says, “Thus says the Lord: “For three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away its punishment, because they took captive the whole captivity to deliver them up to Edom. But I will send a fire upon the wall of Gaza, which shall devour its palaces,” (Amos 1:6-9). Gaza was known as a great Philistine city. It was located along the Mediterranean shore which meant it was a place when economy boomed due to imports and exports. The Bible says not only did they capture communities, but they delivered them up to Edom, meaning those individuals were sold to Edom. This act of human trading released a fiery judgment from God.

A similar punishment was executed against Tyre. The prophet Amos declared, “Because they delivered up the whole captivity to Edom and did not remember the covenant of brotherhood. But I will send a fire upon the wall of Tyre, which shall devour its palaces,” (Amos 1:9-10). Once again the Bible speaks of a judgement due to selling of mankind. The prophet Ezekiel would later pronounce a lamentation against Tyre. The nation was puffed up due to their economic success, which in part stemmed from buying humans. Ezekiel says, “Javan, Tubal and Meshech were your traders. They bartered human lives and vessels of bronze for your merchandise,” (Ezek. 27:13). Eventually the city was destroyed in the midst of the sea and Tyre was no more. Despite these accounts many Christians did not properly interpret scriptures to see that the Noahic curse and the Bible should not have been used as a defense to enslave Blacks.

### Slavery: Pro-Slavery Argument

The Bible known to some as basic instructions before leaving earth, contains all the commands, laws and ordinances given by God for his people. The way that God feels about some topics are quite clear. For instance, within the Ten Commandments, one understands that they cannot worship another god. The same commandments also forbid adultery, covetousness

and murder. Other moral issues for some, might have a gray area. One issue that has negatively affected the body of Christ has been slavery.

Since this institution was established in America, the appalling nature of Christian cooperation with slavery cannot be understood apart from a description of bondage and its effects on Africans.<sup>140</sup> Overall the sentiment from many professing Christians during the height of slavery, was that this was the will of God. One of the first attempts to justify slavery as Biblical was by English minister Thomas Thompson. Thompson argued that slavery was sanctioned by the Old Testament and Mosaic practice of the Hebrews keeping slaves.<sup>141</sup>

Growing voices like Stephen Elliot helped to solidify the inhumane practice. Elliot addressed participants during a Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Georgia. Elliott said, “We conscientiously believe it [slavery] to be a great missionary institution one arranged by God, as he arranges all the moral and religious influences of the world, so that good may be brought out of seeming evil, and a blessing wrung out of every form of the curse.”<sup>142</sup> These same claims were being made across the nation. Americans wanted slaves and the gospel message was not going to stop slave owners from having them. Author John David Smith detailed many Southern arguments indicating that Africans were better off being enslaved. Here is one account:

Negroes, as bondsmen, were happier, more sleek and greasy-looking, and better clothed, than they are now. We never hear the ringing horse-laugh, the picking of banjos, beating of tamborines, and knocking of feet against puncheon-floors, that formerly marked their sans souci existence. Instead thereof, they may be heard to grumble, in

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<sup>140</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Zondervan, 2019), 29.

<sup>141</sup> Ted Booth, “Trapped by His Hermeneutic: An Apocalyptic Defense of Slavery.” *Anglican and Episcopal History* 87, no. 2 (2018): 163. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532504>.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

squads, collected in fence-corners; and may be seen with ashy faces, grim countenances, and squalid appearance generally.<sup>143</sup>

For many people the Bible was weaponized to help them benefit financially and sociably. Those pro-slavery believed that because the Bible did not outright condemn it, that meant it was fair to engage in it. Therefore, based on that ideology, slavery was seen as part of God's larger plan and to reject slavery was to reject God's written word the Bible.<sup>144</sup> As mentioned before, pro-slavery advocate Stephen Elliot wanted to make sure other Christians accepted his stance. According to author John David Smith, Elliot was very vocal about his position. Elliot stressed that slavery brought a better life to Africans and introduced them to Christ.<sup>145</sup> Elliot was noted as saying, the negro was first brought across the ocean to save the Indian from a toil which was destroying him, but while the Indian has perished, the substitute who was brought to die in his place has prospered and multiplied."<sup>146</sup>

Advocates like Elliot needed all the help that they could get to convince the nation that slavery was acceptable in the eyes of God. To solidify this lie, those for slavery looked at all avenues to accomplish this fate. Author Jennifer Barclay wrote a book entitled *The Mark of Slavery: Disability, Race, and Gender in Antebellum America*. In it she outlines various ways that the institution of slavery became a societal norm. She states, "Apologists incorporated historical references that suggested the banality of slavery, emphasizing that it reached back to ancient Greece and found acceptance even among some of the esteemed founders and early

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<sup>143</sup> John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 18-19.

<sup>144</sup> Ted Booth, "Trapped by His Hermeneutic: An Apocalyptic Defense of Slavery." *Anglican and Episcopal History* 87, no. 2 (2018): 164. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26532504>.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

presidents of the United States.”<sup>147</sup> Barclay adds that proslavery ideology eventually included constitutional and economic dimensions that involved access to labor and the protection of commerce and property rights.<sup>148</sup>

Again, to facilitate a successful institution of slavery, those individuals who are enslaved had to be seen as inferior. The Africans were viewed as untrained savages and people having no mental acuity. However, the hypocrisy in viewing them as untrained savages, speaks to the hatred in many hearts. When Americans first stepped foot on new soil, Native Americans already lived here. This nation was not founded by Christopher Columbus. It is difficult to discover new land, when the land was already spoken for. Those who were Natives had to fight for their family and their personhood. Juxtapose that to Africans and these so-called untrained savages were fighting to protect their families, so that kidnappers would not take them.

But this did not matter to some proslavery advocates. One person argued that under our supervision and care, the products of negro labor have almost clothed the world.<sup>149</sup> They go on to say, the white man has educated the negro to a full half-civilized individual.<sup>150</sup> All across the Southern states the mixture of the Bible and an inferiority mindset fueled the acceptance of enslaved Africans. Author John David Smith points to what South Carolina rice planter Dr. J.R. Sparkman had to say:

The negro left to himself as a race has never advanced beyond demi-civilization. And if under the control of a superior race (call it slavery, bondage, servitude, or villenage,) the facts are made patent, his physical wants are better supplied his moral condition

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<sup>147</sup> Jenifer L. Barclay, *The Mark of Slavery: Disability, Race, and Gender in Antebellum America*, (University of Illinois Press, 2021), 88.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>149</sup> John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 20.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

improved, his domestic happiness promoted, his proclivities to vice and crime controlled, and he is made a contributor to the general comfort and welfare of mankind.<sup>151</sup>

Dr. Sparkman's beliefs are in sharp contrast to the blacks in the Bible who established kingdoms, helped to deliver a prophet and bring the gospel message to Ethiopia. In their book entitled, *Return to Glory*, authors Dr. Joel Freeman and Don Griffin extensively demonstrate the superior abilities of the Negro. For example, Egypt developed into a great civilization around 3200 B.C by an Ethiopian known to the Greeks as Menes.<sup>152</sup> Another point would be the founders of the 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty of Egypt were Negro men.<sup>153</sup>

For some Christians in Antebellum South, the Bible was not clear enough about slavery. One southern woman who was proslavery reportedly said, neither the Bible, nor the Apostles, nor Jesus Christ, ever condemned the institution of slavery as a sin.<sup>154</sup> This mindset would become the major sticking point for Evangelicalism. This branch of Christianity steadily spread across the South. By the time of the 1830s it dominated the region. Their defense of the morality of slavery dominated the culture after 1831, and there was no way to ignore its impact on the proslavery ideology.<sup>155</sup>

Author John Patrick Daly explains the proslavery development in his book entitled, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*. Daly writes, "Beginning slowly after the American Revolution

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<sup>151</sup> John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2018), 27.

<sup>152</sup> Dr. Joel A. Freeman & Don B. Griffin, *Return to Glory* (Shippensburg, PA: Treasure House, 2003), 25.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>154</sup> Edward J. Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 108.

<sup>155</sup> John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 4.



and unfolding with increased visibility and intensity between 1831 and the Civil War, a self-conscious proslavery society arose in the Cotton South.”<sup>156</sup> Daly adds that political economist Thomas R. Dew of William and Mary, became a prominent voice for economics and evangelicalism. He published literature showing the growth of the economy and the moral necessity of slavery. Many southerners took Dew’s proslavery stance, as a confirmation that southern slaveholders were sanctioned by divine authority.<sup>157</sup> Armed with the misinterpretation of the so-called curse of Ham, the proslavery propaganda gained plenty of support.

Author Charles Irons wrote the book entitled, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity*. Irons indicated that White evangelicals’ belief in the curse and the tangible benefits from slavery, insulated them from feeling guilty.<sup>158</sup> It was apparent that the benefits of slavery were more important than God’s word. For instance, Methodists and Baptists were the two largest denominations in the United States before they divided in the 1840s.<sup>159</sup> Southern Methodists split from the national group in 1844 to defend the ability of a bishop to own slaves.<sup>160</sup> Baptists formed the Southern Baptist Convention in 1845 in a fight over whether missionaries could own slaves.<sup>161</sup> Southern Baptists have since issued an apology admitting to and denouncing the denominations participation in slavery and racist ideologies.

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<sup>156</sup> John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (The University Press of Kentucky, 2002), 31.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>158</sup> Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 14.

<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth L. Jemison, *Christian Citizens: Reading the Bible in Black and White in the Postemancipation South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 20.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

Another tool that helped to weaponize the proslavery argument with the Bible, was skin color. Black skin was deemed dark, bad, wicked, and therefore evil. White skin was doted as pure and therefore God's best. White skin, and thus whiteness itself, is defined by civility, rationality, beauty, and superiority.<sup>162</sup> Black skin was a mark of degradation that meant blacks were inferior to other races and it signaled the enslaved status of Ham and his descendants.<sup>163</sup> For others anything associated with the appearance of a black person was wrong. Researcher Wongi Park details the accounts of some Christian leaders who shared this sentiment.

In much the same way, Morgan John Rhys (1760–1804), a Welsh Baptist minister, associated the curse with other physical features including hair: “Where a curse is, a mark you think will follow. The colour, shape, and even the hair on their heads, prove the poor Africans to be children of the curse, and fit for nothing but drudgery and slavery.”<sup>164</sup>

The elevation of whiteness was also a success due to the limited understanding of the Noahic curse. Part of Noah's curse indicated that God would enlarge Japheth and that he would dwell in the tents of Shem. Park demonstrates how some misused the Scripture to say that Japheth and his descendants are endowed with power and authority.<sup>165</sup> Park brings in the work of Benjamin Palmer a Southern antebellum writer and Presbyterian minister. Palmer wrote:

Japhet and his race seem designated to be the organ of human civilization, in cultivating the intellectual powers. Dividing historically into two great branches, the Japhetic whites, spreading over the diversified continent of Europe, through a protracted discipline developed the higher powers of the soul in politics, jurisprudence, science, and art: while

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<sup>162</sup> Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 2.

<sup>163</sup> Wongi Park, "The Blessing of Whiteness in the Curse of Ham: Reading Gen 9:18–29 in the Antebellum South." *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 928, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fblessing-whiteness-curse-ham-reading-gen-9-18-29%2Fdocview%2F2602171593%2Fse-2>.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

the Asiatic Japhetites dispersed over a more monotonous continent, embark in those pursuits of industry fitted to the lower capacities of our nature.<sup>166</sup>

All these factors and more gave white Americans the power to create racial hierarchies to justify their subhuman treatment of the people of color they colonized and enslaved. This was the beginning of the ideology of white supremacy.<sup>167</sup> That supremacy found its way into the development of a white Jesus.

Author David G. Horrell wrote a book entitled *Ethnicity and Inclusion*. The book addresses religion, race and the construction of whiteness. Horrell wrote, the connections between Christianness and whiteness overlap with intersecting facets of identity, implicated in enduring social conflicts.<sup>168</sup> One enduring conflict is the idea of Jesus being white. For hundreds of years Christianity has been cloaked in an understanding that the gospel belonged to Europeans. In their book, *The Color of Christ* authors Edward Blum and Paul Harvey outline the birth of what became known as the image of a white Jesus. The authors explain how his holy whiteness has been used to sanctify racial hierarchies.<sup>169</sup> Whiteness became a crucial symbol of national identity and some Protestants tried to win the young nation for Jesus, by mass-producing and mass-distributing him.<sup>170</sup> This newfound image of Jesus emboldened those who were white and gave them the false notion that the Bible only favored them.

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<sup>166</sup> Wongi Park, "The Blessing of Whiteness in the Curse of Ham: Reading Gen 9:18–29 in the Antebellum South." *Religions* 12, no. 11 (2021): 928, <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fblessing-whiteness-curse-ham-reading-gen-9-18-29%2Fdocview%2F2602171593%2Fse-2>.

<sup>167</sup> Margaret Hunter, *Race, Gender and the Politics of Skin Tone* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2005), 2.

<sup>168</sup> David G. Horrell, *Ethnicity and Inclusion: Religion, Race, and Whiteness in Constructions of Jewish and Christian Identities* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2020), xix.

<sup>169</sup> Edward Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Unfortunately, the gospel message became tainted, and the true love of Christ was not exhibited to blacks. As enslaved individuals were in a living hell, the image of someone who could help them looked like their masters. One of the early renderings of a white Jesus, stemmed from a vision that Joseph Smith supposedly received from God.<sup>171</sup> Smith was the founder of Mormonism and the Latter-Day Saints. Smith told a follower in 1844 that the Jesus he beheld in the vision had a light complexion and blue eyes.<sup>172</sup> His vision reportedly got the confirmation he needed. That is because another follower named Anson Call also claimed that Christ also appeared to him with light beautiful skin, large blue eyes, and black hair.<sup>173</sup> Authors Blum and Harvey show how Smith's image of Jesus and his church were part of a movement happening across the nation. They were present at and participated in the birth of the white American Christ, an advent that paralleled the birth and rise of the white male citizen as the embodied figure of civic inclusion in the United States.<sup>174</sup>

The evil in the hearts of men caused many throughout the years to reject true history. Jesus historically was a Palestinian Jew, therefore he could not have blonde hair and blue eyes. The audacity to further push this narrative resulted in the psychological and mental anguish of blacks. There was no excuse for this acceptance of a false image only that of white supremacy. Many can argue that the scripture gives a glimpse of Jesus in his glorified state after the resurrection. In the Book of Revelation, John details an account where the voice of Jesus spoke. The Bible says the voice indicated, "I am the Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last," (Rev.

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<sup>171</sup> Edward Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 76.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

1:11). John then describes his vision, “His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace,” (Rev. 1:15). Based on science, blonde hair is not white, and wool has a different texture from straight hair. Uniquely, eyes as flames of fire cannot translate into blue eyes. Lastly the color of brass is strikingly very yellow like gold. John’s description of Jesus does not match that of Joseph Smith or Anson Call.

By and large these factors coupled with the false interpretation of the Noahic curse, helped to substantiate the proslavery argument.

#### Slavery: Anti-slavery argument

While the proslavery voices were firm in their positions, the same was true for those against slavery. The major voices for anti-slavery were known as abolitionists. Abolitionism developed in the later 1780s and its followers were trying to figure out the best way to put pressure on governments to act against slavery.<sup>175</sup> Rebecca Goetz authored the book entitled *The Baptism of Early Virginia; How Christianity Created Race*. She details the message from Quaker antislavery activist Anthony Benezel. His words reverberated with many people. Benezel said, “Why ought a Negro be less free than the subjects of Britain, or a white face in America? Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?”<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> J. R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-Slavery, c 1787-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 68.

<sup>176</sup> Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 171.

Speaking of God, many against slavery understood the institution was evil and that people were using the Bible out of context. Jesus Christ's words and teachings were enough for activists. Some saying, "We believe in the Christian religion. It commands us to have good will to all men; to love our neighbors as ourselves, and to do unto all men as we would they should do unto us."<sup>177</sup>

The American Revolution was a defining moment for the conversation of slavery. As tensions between the thirteen colonies and the British rule continued, many wondered what would become of the slave trade. Between 1774 and 1783, no fewer than seven states banned the importation of slaves, either permanently or temporarily.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, several states, including Vermont, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, went further by abolishing slavery itself, a movement that accelerated even more rapidly after 1783.<sup>179</sup> However, the southern states were not on board. They saw the economic benefits of enslaving people from African and those slave owners refused to give in.

That did not stop others from fighting. Those against slavery were determined to get their message across to federal lawmakers. In 1787, Philadelphians formed the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and recruited Benjamin Franklin as the society's first president.<sup>180</sup> Franklin later drafted an antislavery petition for Congress. His petition stated that,

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<sup>177</sup> Edward Blum and Paul Harvey, *The Color of Christ: The Son of God and the Saga of Race in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>178</sup> J. R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-Slavery, c 1787-1820* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), 69.

<sup>179</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>180</sup> Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 171.

“mankind are all formed by the same Almighty Being, alike objects of his Care, and equally designed for the Enjoyment of Happiness the Christian Religion teaches us to believe.”<sup>181</sup>

The Quakers were one of the staunchest advocates to abolish slavery. The term “Quaker” was born during a period of social and political revolution in seventeenth-century England and remained as an unrealized promise of the Christian hope to “shake the world to its foundations.”<sup>182</sup> They were so against slavery that if someone in their group owned a slave, that person would be disowned or removed from the Quaker community.<sup>183</sup> The Quakers even moved to get the attention of Congress. At one point supporter named David Cooper hoped the Continental Congress would use their humanity to decry the wrongs of slavery. Cooper reportedly said, “Now is the time to demonstrate to Europe, to the whole world, that America was in earnest” when she pled “that all mankind came from the hand of their Creator equally free.”<sup>184</sup>

As abolitionists grew across the nation, those who were enslaved across the world wanted to send a clear picture. They wanted people to understand that slavery had no place in any society. The Haitian Revolution was a turning point in this matter. During the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century the French colony of Saint-Domingue set off an international crisis. What seemed as a crisis to slave owners, was an inspiration to enslaved individuals. By 1804 enslaved Africans in Haiti overthrew the French regime becoming the first black nation to have its independence. The idea of possible slave revolts occurring in America concerned slave owners. But for those

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<sup>181</sup> Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 171.

<sup>182</sup> Ryan P. Jordan, *Slavery and the Meetinghouse: The Quakers and the Abolitionist Dilemma, 1820-1865* (Indiana University Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

enslaved, it served as an example of how to end an evil institution. Chiefly, Prince Hall the well-known abolitionist, and veteran of the American Revolution predicted a brighter day for enslaved Americans based on the events in Haiti.<sup>185</sup> In a later speech by Frederick Douglass, the educator noted that blacks owed much to abolitionists but owed incomparably more to Haiti.<sup>186</sup> Douglass stated that after the former slaves of Saint-Domingue defeated fifty thousand of Napoleon's veteran troops, the white world could never be the same.<sup>187</sup> According to Douglass it was this revolt that shook the church:

Until Haiti spoke, Douglass pointed out, "no Christian nation had abolished Negro slavery. Until she spoke, the slave trade was sanctioned by all the Christian nations of the world, and our land of liberty and light included, Until Haiti spoke, the church was silent, and the pulpit dumb."<sup>188</sup>

Back in America, Quakers and other Christians were using the Bible as their weapon against slavery. People like the Reverend Charles Beecher laid out plenty of arguments for the destruction of slavery. Reverend Beecher produced anti-slavery tracts for the American Anti-Slavery Society. Rev. Beecher says, "slavery degrades labor, discourages education, science, art: enfeebles commerce, blights agriculture, and continually works society towards barbarism."<sup>189</sup>

His argument continues by stating that:

God is revealed in the Bible as the Author of the family state, and the jealous defender of its purity. The family is the oldest, simplest, strongest, and most sacred institution of God on earth any system of laws, then, which nullifies the family, and legalizes concubinage,

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<sup>185</sup> Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 20.

<sup>186</sup> David P. Geggus, *The impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>189</sup> Charles, Beecher, *The God of the Bible against slavery* (New York, American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), 3.



is in direct and flagrant opposition to the law of God, and must excite his deepest displeasure.<sup>190</sup>

Author Mason Lowance wrote a book entitled, *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America*. A portion of the book focuses on Biblical antislavery arguments. In it Lowance documents a sermon called ‘Negro Slavery Unjustifiable’ by Alexander McLeod. McLeod’s premise comes from Exodus 21:16 that decrees that anyone who steals a man and sells him shall be put to death. Lowance’s exegetical approach zeros in on manstealing and how that practice is immoral. To bolster his argument, he uses the Enlightenment doctrine. He says in part, “to hold any of our fellow-men in perpetual slavery is sinful. This appears from the inconsistency of the practice of holding slaves with the natural rights of man.”<sup>191</sup> Using scripture McLeod proclaims, “The Bible is the criterion of doctrine and conduct. It represents the European and the Asiatic, the African and American, as different members of the same great family the different children of the same benign and universal parent.”<sup>192</sup> Others against slavery take issue with the Noahic curse or the curse of Ham:

This prophecy of Noah is the vade mecum of slaveholders, and they never venture abroad without it. It is a pocket-piece for sudden occasion—a keepsake to dote over—a charm to spell-bind opposition, and a magnet to attract whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie. But closely as they cling to it, cursed be Canaan is a poor drug to stupefy a throbbing conscience—a mocking lullaby, vainly wooing slumber to unquiet tossings, and crying.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Charles, Beecher, *The God of the Bible against slavery* (New York, American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), 3.

<sup>191</sup> Mason Lowance, “Biblical Antislavery Arguments” in *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776-1865* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 89.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

More compelling evidence shows that individuals like Reverend Charles Beecher presented a potpourri of anti-slavery arguments. In his literature he looks at the relationship between abuses of the legal system and the love of God. Rev. Beecher writes, “Hence no one can deny that any system which is radically selfish must be hateful to God. But slavery confesses this of itself.”<sup>194</sup> He points out that any system then, which darkens the mind and prevents it from repentance, faith and holy living must receive the highest degree of the wrath of God.<sup>195</sup>

For the most part those against slavery had a common denominator and that was the idea of respecting personhood. The Bible records that all human beings are fearfully and wonderfully made by God (Ps. 139:14). The perpetual bondage and inhumane treatment from slavery could affect God’s intent for mankind. The Bible says to love the Lord your God with all your heart mind and soul. Despite what pro-slavery advocates believed, enslaved individuals were free because, All man's powers of body and mind are God's gift to him.<sup>196</sup>

### Slavery: Exegesis of Slavery Scriptures

“If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it,” (Gen. 4:7). Just like sexual immorality, slavery is a sin that many people need to conquer. The idea of owning and controlling someone against their will is cruel and antithetical to scriptures. It is the scriptures that brings peace and establishes truth. That truth does not bend to society, nor can it do so. Jesus said I am the way the

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<sup>194</sup> Charles, Beecher, *The God of the Bible against slavery* (New York, American Anti-Slavery Society, 1855), 5.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>196</sup> Mason Lowance, “Biblical Antislavery Arguments” in *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776-1865* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 93.

truth and the life. Life is found throughout the Bible but when it comes to slavery, just like Pharaoh many people developed a callous heart. Speaking of Pharaoh when Moses told him to let my people go, Pharaoh was not moved. Pharaoh was more concerned about maintaining an economical system that made Egypt flourish. Similarly, many Christian American slave owners felt the same way.

Dan Shepherd is the author of a study that looks at the intersection of slavery and the Bible. He states that many Southern plantation owners were known to favor a particular verse in the New Testament.<sup>197</sup> That scripture was, “Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh,” (1 Pet. 2:18). As was noted in chapter two of this thesis, Biblical servants were nothing like the enslaved people in the Antebellum south. The Greek word for servants here is translated to oiketes. It means a fellow resident, menial domestic, household servant. Strong’s Expanded Concordance states that, an oiketes was one of the family, of the household but not necessarily born in the home. Many servants/slaves took care of their master’s home. To enumerate this point, it can be likened to Abraham selecting his oldest servant to find his son Isaac a wife.

The NKJV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible indicates that household slaves were normally in better socioeconomic situations than free peasants. Even the usage of the word master in scriptures carried a different connotation. Sarah called her husband Abraham her master or lord. It showed that Sarah understood the power of being covered. Her master or lord was a provider and a protector. As a master Abraham knew the responsibilities that came with

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<sup>197</sup> Dan Shepherd, "Teaching about American Slavery and its Connections to Christianity and the Bible." *Social Studies Research and Practice* 14, no. 2 (2019): 232  
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fteaching-about-american-slavery-connections%2Fdocview%2F2509254969%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>.

that title. He was expected to maintain a household in a way that would be pleasing to the Lord which would not hinder his blessings from God. A master in slavery times had no desire to be like Abraham. They were not focusing on pleasing God but fattening their pockets at whatever ungodly cost.

Another scripture to exegete is part of Paul's letter to Philemon. This is another scripture that was weaponized for slavery especially when it came to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. The law allowed for the capture and return of slaves who escaped to another state. This Pauline letter was the perfect fit for proslavery advocates. The Fugitive Slave Laws became part of the system of laws supported by the United States Constitution during the nineteenth century.<sup>198</sup> In the letter Paul pleads with Philemon to receive Onesimus no longer as a slave but brother. Paul begins his plea by saying, "Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you," (Philem. 1:8-9). Paul's use of the word appeal demonstrates that as an apostle of Christ, he can command Philemon to act according to the laws of the Kingdom of God. Instead, Paul hopes that the Lord of Christ will compel Philemon to do what is right. By juxtaposing the Fugitive Slave Laws, proslavery advocates used this account to illustrate that slaves should be returned to their owners.

Nonetheless, Onesimus was no longer a slave but a brother in Christ. Scripturally anyone who accepts Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior is a new creation. Therefore, the old person is dead, which also meant the slavery that was associated with the person's life. This Pauline letter may serve as a rebuke to those advocating for slavery. Paul makes it clear by saying, "no longer a slave but more than a slave – a beloved brother, especially to me but how

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<sup>198</sup> Mason Lowance, "Biblical Antislavery Arguments" in *A House Divided: The Antebellum Slavery Debates in America, 1776-1865* (Princeton University Press, 2003), 52.

much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord,” (Philem. 1:16). Jesus himself told his followers that whoever does the will of God is his brother, sister, and mother (Mark 3:35). By Paul calling Onesimus a brother, that solidified his position in the family of Christ. Now that Onesimus was part of the family he could no longer be a slave but free in Christ.

God’s ultimate plan of redemption was to deliver his creation out from under the power of sin. Sin is what keeps a person away from the perfect and pleasing will of God. Sin darkened the hearts of proslavery advocates. Many of these Christians forgot that even those with dark skin, were created based in the image and likeness of God. To disregard someone black, meant to offend the very likeness of God. As a matter of fact, what many people call the golden rule is really rooted in the Bible. Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 7:12). But their white supremacy caused many not to apply the scriptures to themselves. Most notably many of them highlighted the silence of Jesus on the matter as his stamp of approval of the institution. If someone followed the teachings of Jesus, one would find that many times he spoke in parables and analogies. The Word of God could only have been understood through the power of his Holy Spirit. The Bible says the Spirit searches all things. “For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God,” (1 Cor. 2:11). Ultimately, if someone would have just spent more time with the Lord, he would have convicted them in regard slavery.

All things considered, the misinterpretation of scriptures really affected the lives of countless individuals who were of African descent. Some might argue that proper exegesis of the scriptures is difficult especially if someone is unlearned. The apostle Paul himself went off to train in scriptures for three years. Although the Bible might seem convoluted to some there was

no doubt a disconnect between Christian proslavery activists and those against it. The bottom line is God is love and the Bible teaches all the unique facets of love:

Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails (1 Cor. 13: 4-8).

Based on this definition of love, God does not agree with slavery. He demonstrated this when he appointed Moses to deliver his people from the hands of Pharaoh. Some might agree the Bible is too vague. Regardless, God always has a ram in the bush to clear up any ambiguity. In a letter to Timothy, Paul offered a solution for any confusion that one might have about God's laws. Paul says that the law is not made for the righteous but for the ungodly and sinners (1 Tim. 1:8). He sums it up by saying that anything else that is contrary to sound doctrine brings one to the need for the law. The kidnapping, buying, selling and raping of an individual seems to fit the bill.

## **Generational Impact: Black Church Formation**

“For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations,” (Ps. 100:5). Each generation always seems to have an issue that only God can handle. Even if the problem stems from a misunderstanding of how God operates or whatever the issue, the Bible is the measure. At the center of this thesis is the misinterpretation of what is known as the curse of Ham. Due to a lack of mental and spiritual acuity, many Christians were destroying the message and reputation of Jesus Christ. His works and word were cast into disrepute because some in the Body of Christ were not rightly dividing the Word of Truth. Due to improper exegesis of scriptures, the notion of the alleged curse of Ham was in part a blueprint for the commencement of slavery and eventually the catalyst for a new church. That church was the black church.

The onslaught of professing Christians who believed it was God’s will for their brown and dark-skinned brothers and sisters to be bound, is in stark contrast to the essence of the scriptures. The Holy Scriptures are our roadmap that points people to their Creator and not a book that should be used to keep one in chains. Those chains ultimately lead to several stumbling blocks. Jesus said to his disciples, “Things that cause people to stumble are bound to come, but woe to anyone through whom they come,” (Luke 17:1). The evil chain of slavery is what some in the body of Christ wanted to keep alive. For instance, John Henry Hopkins was a northern Episcopal bishop and avid defender of slavery. Professor of Religious Studies Kevin Burrell notes that Hopkins was clear on what he, Hopkins stood for. Hopkins believed that the African race should be subject to slavery not freedom, because to him that is the proper place

for the Negro.<sup>199</sup> Sentiment like this helped to kick start the black church.

It was not an easy task for blacks to begin their own church. Establishing their own was the beginning of a journey for personal and spiritual freedom. Before many of African descent were kidnapped and brought to America, Christianity flourished in Africa since the beginning and there were likely Christians in Africa before there were Europe.<sup>200</sup> As previously stated during the first century, Ethiopia was the first kingdom to accept Christianity as its state religion.<sup>201</sup> Additionally Africa was the place that fueled the understanding of many Christian teachings. The canon of scripture was explicitly defined for eastern and western Christianity in Africa.<sup>202</sup> Thomas Oden is the author of *The Rebirth of African Orthodoxy*. He further explains the roots to understanding Christian theology. He writes, “The phrase early African orthodoxy is the form of classic Christian consensual teaching that was first planted in Africa by Africans from Mark to Clement to Tertullian to Cyprian to Augustine to Cyril the Great all African born.”<sup>203</sup> So, several of the early church theologians were from Africa. Tertullian was from Carthage in Northern Africa and was believed to be the first person to use the term trinity to describe the Godhead.<sup>204</sup>

Provided that Africa carried the foundation for Christian teaching, it is this same faith and understanding that runs in the blood of many Africans. Truly, it is no wonder that those who

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<sup>199</sup> Kevin Burrell, “Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century.” *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 742. DOI:10.3390/rel12090742.

<sup>200</sup> David L. Eastman, *Early North African Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 5.

<sup>201</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 79.

<sup>202</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of African Orthodoxy: Return to Foundations* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2016), 14.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>204</sup> Jerome Gay, *The Whitewashing of Christianity* (Chicago, IL, 13<sup>th</sup> & Joan, 2020), 110.



were enslaved were versed on how to establish churches. Early African orthodox faith is in accordance with both the ancient faith and the present faith of countless African Catholics, Copts, Pentecostals, charismatics, African Independent Churches, and many Protestant believers of Spirit-led scriptural teachings.<sup>205</sup>

Despite the hypocrisy of Christians who espoused ungodly biblical interpretations, it was not enough to undercut the true teachings of scripture. From kidnapping to sexual and physical abuse, those who were enslaved understood, those actions were contrary to a God of love and freedom. Enslaved Africans recognized the contradiction between word and deed, and those who still embraced orthodox Christian tradition believed to move beyond falsehood and hypocrisy.<sup>206</sup> Efrem Smith is the author of *The Post-Black and Post-White Church*. He details how enslaved individuals essentially went back to their Christian African roots. He says, “They made the Gospel of Christ a liberating religious experience by dropping the message of docility and instead understanding the Christian life as a free existence.”<sup>207</sup>

That free existence almost did not occur. Many slave owners prohibited enslaved individuals to hold their own religious services. When blacks attended church with their white slave owners, many blacks were separated from the white church goers. Some of the slave owner’s actions were so impious that many enslaved people were taught with a slave bible.<sup>208</sup>

The Slave Bible was published in London in 1807 on behalf the Society for the Conversion of

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<sup>205</sup> Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of African Orthodoxy: Return to Foundations* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2016), 17.

<sup>206</sup> Efrem Smith, *The Post-Black and Post-White Church: Becoming the Beloved Community in a Multi-Ethnic World* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 103.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>208</sup> “The Slave Bible Returns Home to Fisk University,” Fisk University, <https://www.fisk.edu/university-news-and-publications/the-slave-bible-returns-home-to-fisk-university/>.

Negro Slaves.<sup>209</sup> According to the Museum of the Bible, this book was used to teach enslaved Africans how to read while at the same time introducing them to the Christian faith. Nonetheless this book was in complete error. At one point The Slave Bible was part of an exhibit with the Museum of the Bible and Fisk University.<sup>210</sup> The Bible instructs that, “You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you,” (Deut. 4:2).

Albeit, many slave owners embraced slavery thought differently. As the name suggests the Slave Bible was for slaves. Its publishers deliberately removed a myriad of biblical passages, such as the exodus story. It was all an effort to bruise the hope of those enslaved and to keep them bound. Enslaved servants were taught that this Bible was the authentic Word of God and had to be embraced. Having this false Bible helped to maintain the evil institution of slavery. Many working tirelessly to the benefit of their captors.<sup>211</sup>

Regardless of the deceptive tactics, the power of the gospel resonated with many enslaved individuals. They wanted a chance to serve God but with no restrictions and lies. With just a few people black churches would pop up but in secret. As a matter of fact, meeting together was considered conspiratorial by planters, meetings were deemed illegal, and one could be severely punished.<sup>212</sup> Some planters attempted to control black worship on plantations by renting chapels or hiring black or white preachers of their choice restricting times and places of

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<sup>209</sup> “The Slave Bible Returns Home to Fisk University,” Fisk University, <https://www.fisk.edu/university-news-and-publications/the-slave-bible-returns-home-to-fisk-university/>.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ira Berlin, *The Long Emancipation: The Demise of Slavery in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), 37.

<sup>212</sup> Efreem Smith, *The Post-Black and Post-White Church: Becoming the Beloved Community in a Multi-Ethnic World* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 103.

worship.<sup>213</sup> Author Efrem Smith says there are a handful of reasons for the formation of the black church:

It originally formed for two reasons. One was for slaves to have a more liberating worship experience and, through contextualized Christian formation, their own practical theology. The other reason, for slaves who weren't as radical in their worship practices, was that it provided an alternative to White churches in the South, where Blacks were not allowed to be part of the worshipping community.<sup>214</sup>

Smith does not stop there. He adds that enslaved Africans who sought to shape Christianity to their mental and spiritual needs, developed what is known as the invisible institution.<sup>215</sup> That invisible institution was known as the Black church, partly because participants were viewed as illiterate and slave religion was considered invisible to historians until the 1970s.<sup>216</sup> Eventually scholars found that they were educated thanks to the discoveries of grave art, folklore, slave narratives, and autobiographies.<sup>217</sup> However, there was more. Enslaved people expressed their aspirations, fears, and values through an oral tradition that had characterized the West African cultures from which their ancestors had come.<sup>218</sup>

The formation of the black church serves as an indictment against other Christians. The Bible contains the same information about the great I am, Elohim, Jehovah-Nissi and the list goes on. There is not a white Bible, black Bible or Hispanic Bible, the Word of God transcends race and speaks to the human heart. Unfortunately, a spirit of pride, hatred and even superiority

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<sup>213</sup> Janet D. Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South* (University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 198.

<sup>214</sup> Efrem Smith, *The Post-Black and Post-White Church: Becoming the Beloved Community in a Multi-Ethnic World* (John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2012), 103.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>216</sup> Timothy E. Fulop & Albert Raboteau, *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture* (Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 57.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

entered in the hearts and minds of some believers. This is akin to Lucifer and his fall from grace. Although he had access to all that God had, he turned wicked by his own heart (Ezekiel 18:15). Similarly, this wickedness gave Christianity a black eye. That black eye resulted in the establishment of more black churches.

The African Methodist Episcopal Church or AME was a great example of black church expansion. The AME church has its roots under the leadership of Richard Allen. Allen was a former slave who eventually became a prolific preacher. Allen's theology contained some Wesleyan influence. Part of that theology affirmed the humanity of all peoples and required that all should be physically and spiritually freed from the bondage of both slavery and sin.<sup>219</sup> This was in sharp contrast to how white Methodists treated blacks. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodists eschewed being identified with the poor and the slave.<sup>220</sup>

Allen was committed to spreading the gospel no matter the skin color. At some point he quickly understood his mission was to spiritually empower enslaved blacks. Dennis Dickerson is the author of *The African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Dennis details the history of the Methodist denomination alongside the split that became the AME church. Dennis points out a story about Allen:

During his preaching tour of the Middle Atlantic, he observed that “most of my congregation was white” and that “there were but few colored people in the neighborhood.” As a Methodist preacher committed to the salvation of all, this was a problem. After a prominent elder among Philadelphia Methodists invited him to preach in the city, he “saw a large field open in seeking and instructing my African brethren, who had been a long-forgotten people.”<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>219</sup> Dennis Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 23.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

Those long-forgotten people would later be the individuals looking to make sense out of life.

Allen would soon equip his brethren with the tools needed. Dickerson says, “at different times and in various venues they searched for ideas and methodologies to affirm their humanity and worth as spiritual beings.”<sup>222</sup> With the help of Methodist resources many were educated. Dickerson says available to them were multiple intellectual and tactical resources. Those resources engendered rhetoric of the American, French, and Haitian revolutions, transatlantic anti-slavery thought and action.<sup>223</sup>

In 1816, a major shift took place. The African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed with Richard Allen being the ordained as the first black bishop in Western History.<sup>224</sup> This movement was the beginning of a clear message for whites across the nation. The formation of this church would demonstrate the true freedom that God proclaimed in his word. The Bible says, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” (Rom. 10:12-13). The scripture was bringing to light that anyone including enslaved blacks had access to God and his word. By being saved, they identified as being children of Elohim and not worthless blacks.

Throughout the 1820 s, Allen’s church continued its impressive growth.<sup>225</sup> Through the AME church, he facilitated the furtherance of black freedom despite the forces of empire that

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<sup>222</sup> Dennis Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 24.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>224</sup> Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York University Press, 2008), 173.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

promoted the slave trade and slavery.<sup>226</sup> Author Dennis Dickerson says, Allen also designed African Methodism to connect with the emancipationist forces stirring in the Atlantic World to end slavery and validate the personhood of blacks.<sup>227</sup> The church also produced a manual entitled, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. This manual laid out the tenants of the faith, the ordination of ministers and singing hymns. Nearly two hundred pages, the book stood as an enduring monument to black theology and was the longest published document crafted by Allen.<sup>228</sup> By the 1830s, the AME had distributed thousands of copies, making it probably the second most popular book behind the Bible read by blacks.<sup>229</sup>

Conversely, although the AME church was growing in number, that did not mean that the hearts of slave owners were turned. Richard Newman is the author of *Freedom's Prophet*. It focuses on the life of Bishop Allen and the formation of the AME church. Newman writes black Methodists faced opposition from white preachers. So much so, that many black Methodists were considered outcasts among those who professed to be children of God.<sup>230</sup>

As black Methodists increased in number, they “experienced grievances too numerous to mention,” including having their very own church nearly sold from under their feet. Blacks wandered in the wilderness of mistreatment but never wavered from their Christian faith. Finally, the Lord delivered them.... As the Bible predicted, princes would indeed come out of Egypt and Ethiopia would rise again.<sup>231</sup>

Many others would soon follow AME's lead by branching out and starting communities that

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<sup>226</sup> Dennis Dickerson, *The African Methodist Episcopal Church: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 24

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>228</sup> Richard S. Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York University Press, 2008), 177.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

empowered Blacks. But this time around, the idea of Christianity was out the window.

### **Generational Impact: Abandoning Christianity (Nation of Islam)**

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has this world’s goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3: 16-17). For many Blacks, the silence of the church as it relates to slavery was felt loud and clear. Those actions were incongruous to the scriptures. Some enslaved individuals watched in horror as their communities were destroyed, families torn apart, and spiritual growth was stifled. Many were left wondering how a compassionate, loving God would allow so much turmoil for blacks. The negative impact from what was dubbed the white man’s religion was a burden that some could not endure. Eventually an exodus from Christianity became the norm. To be clear, Christianity is not a white man’s religion but nonetheless behavior from some white Christians resulted in severe suffering for blacks and many of them then and now still believing this myth.<sup>232</sup>

It is residual effects from that pain that forged a new path for some. Many blacks were looking for a religion or ideology that affirmed their blackness, culture, and dignity. Some found solace in the Nation of Islam. The Nation of Islam or NOI has its roots in an early black nationalistic Islamic sect called the Moorish Science Temple of America.<sup>233</sup> It was founded by Noble Drew Ali. NOI’s teachings were appealing to blacks because of its message of racial identification, reform, and Black uplift.<sup>234</sup> Black uplift was a major selling point because no

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<sup>232</sup> Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as an Exercise in Hope* (InterVarsity Press, 2020), 121.

<sup>233</sup> Damon Richardson, “The Nation of Islam,” in *Urban Apologetics*, ed. Eric Mason (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 68.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.



longer were these individuals viewed as chattel, but as human beings. NOI did not promote the evil of slavery, but Christianity did. Ali believed African Americans needed to discover their historical and cultural roots. He taught that the true identity of Black Americans was ethnically Moorish and spiritually Islamic. His purpose was to declare that they were not negroes, blacks or colored asiatics.<sup>235</sup> Asiatics meaning someone from the continent of Asia. All these ideals caught the attention of those formally enslaved. Here is an ideology teaching them to walk in dignity, embracing their blackness and not having to live under the control of white man.

NOI eventually went through a change with W.D Fard being at the helm of the movement. Under his leadership, NOI became a proto-Islamic, separatist movement in the tradition of Noble Drew Ali.<sup>236</sup> This meant, Fard believed that Islam was the natural religion of the Negro, even before Muhammad the prophet of Mecca ever taught it.<sup>237</sup> However there were some concerns. The NOI became a hodgepodge of beliefs, a cult built on religious hokum and the gullible desperation of simple blacks.<sup>238</sup>

After a series of incarcerations, a new leader was needed to continue the movement. In comes Elijah Poole eventually known as Elijah Muhammad. Elijah jumps right in and begins to claim that he is a prophet of Allah and that Fard was Allah himself.<sup>239</sup> Muhammad expanded the movement into cities across the nation. The membership more than quadrupled. He led the group

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<sup>235</sup> Damon Richardson, "The Nation of Islam," in *Urban Apologetics*, ed. Eric Mason (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 69.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

through the 1930s until he died in 1975.<sup>240</sup> Before he died Muhammad started disciplining someone by the name of Malcom Little. He would later be called Malcom X.

From politics, civil rights and patriarchal family advancement, the NOI made blacks feel like they belonged. This black identity was central to the psyche of many enslaved individuals. They were now embracing a new life and rejecting years of teaching that concluded Blacks were inferior. Most of those inferior beliefs came from the behaviors of some professing Christians. Author Eric Lincoln wrote a book entitled, *Coming Through the Fire*. Lincoln says, “It is clear from the black experience in the white church that identity is not a fixed value to be arbitrarily conferred or inferred from principles of reason or rationality.”<sup>241</sup> However Islam was the opposite. Religious values united believers in one universal umma, or brotherhood, transcending race, class, and nationality.<sup>242</sup> This is far from what many enslaved blacks experienced at the hands of Bible believing slave owners. Blacks looked to religion to give them identity because of the teachings of the Bible. The Bible made it clear that everyone including blacks were free people in the eyes of God. However just like the Israelites their deliverance would take years. years.

The Nation of Islam gave blacks more ammunition to have more pride in their roots. NOI’s founder Drew Ali believed, as descendants of Moors, blacks should not serve the gods of the whites’ religion.<sup>243</sup> Ali espoused that the Moors’ forefathers were the true and divine

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<sup>240</sup> Damon Richardson, “The Nation of Islam,” in *Urban Apologetics*, ed. Eric Mason (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 71.

<sup>241</sup> Eric Lincoln, *Coming Through the Fire: Surviving Race and Place in America* (Duke University Press, 1996), 104.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>243</sup> Edward E. Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (State University of New York Press, 2002), 54.

founders of the first religious creed and brought forth salvation for mankind.<sup>244</sup> These beliefs were contrary to what enslaved individuals learned and it gave them a sense of community. Sherman Jackson is the author of *Islam and Black America*. Jackson says, the image of Islam was a friend and liberator of the oppressed.<sup>245</sup> Therefore since blacks were the quintessential oppressed people of the world, it was only natural that they would gravitate to Islam.<sup>246</sup> Black Muslims had done more to exemplify black pride and to foster unity among the black masses than any of the more reputable civil rights organizations.<sup>247</sup>

Although Islam was popular when it came to black identity, the religious side was antithetical to the scriptures. NOI denounced a foundational aspect of Christianity and that is the Trinity. Elijah Muhammad, a future leader of the movement says it is heretical teaching created by the white man:

Even the very basic principle of Christianity is wrong and false (three Gods in one). And that one of them had to do, He being the Son of the Father, to save the wicked world of the Caucasian race is the most damnable teaching against your peace and happiness. It takes you right out of life.<sup>248</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> Edward E. Curtis, *Islam in Black America: Identity, Liberation and Difference in African-American Islamic Thought* (State University of New York Press, 2002), 54.

<sup>245</sup> Sherman A. Jackson, *Islam and the Black American: Looking Toward the Third Resurrection* (Oxford University Press USA, 2005) 24.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>247</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, "The Muslim Mission in the Context of American Social History," in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop & Albert J. Raboteau (Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 286.

<sup>248</sup> Damon Richardson, "The Nation of Islam," in *Urban Apologetics*, ed. Eric Mason (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 81.

Elijah Muhammad seemed like he was the answer to many years of prayer. He used the Bible, secular mythology, and his own experience to connect with his listeners. He met his converts where they were, addressing their need which were psychological, economic, social, and political.<sup>249</sup>

Despite the black empowerment, there were other aspects of NOI that did not line up with scripture. For example, NOI rejects the teaching of the virgin birth of Jesus. They believe the Christians account twists the actual story of Joseph. They hold to the notion that Joseph visited Mary and impregnated her.<sup>250</sup> Conversely, this goes against the prophecy spoken in the Old Testament. The Bible declares, “Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel,” (Isa. 7:14). The scriptures also confirm the birthplace of Jesus and the events leading to his birth. The NOI rejects the deity of Jesus Christ. Their doctrine concludes all the messianic prophecies of the Old & New Testament, do not point to Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>251</sup> Still, their position of black uplift seemed to carry more appeal to former enslaved individuals.

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<sup>249</sup> C. Eric Lincoln, “The Muslim Mission in the Context of American Social History,” in *African-American Religion: Interpretive Essays in History and Culture*, ed. Timothy E. Fulop & Albert J. Raboteau (Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 286.

<sup>250</sup> Damon Richardson, “The Nation of Islam,” in *Urban Apologetics*, ed. Eric Mason (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 81.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

### Generational Impact: Hebrew Israelites

All these major ideological shifts in the lives of many blacks, stem from the generational effects of the so-called curse of Ham. The false interpretation of the curse resulted in a traumatic chain of events for blacks. After many blacks left the traditional white church, they formed their own. Some Christians often say that black Christians should find their identity in Jesus Christ.<sup>252</sup> To an extent this mindset seems insincere. That statement is easy to say when members of a particular community are not being kidnapped, raped, and sold into slavery. When someone becomes a Christian that does not nullify their ethnicity or their nationality. Finding a community of like-minded individuals is what many formerly enslaved people sought after. Bishop Allen of the African Methodist Episcopal Church opened the floodgates for blacks to worship God and not feel burdened by the ills of white Christians. Then came the Nation of Islam or NOI. It showed the blacks another way to love themselves and realize their place in the community. Another group that drew the attention of those looking for Black identity were the Hebrew Israelites.

Hebrew Israelism is viewed as a fast-growing black identity movement geared to those familiar with Christianity and are interested in embracing their Blackness.<sup>253</sup> Unfortunately this ethnic identity gap is a baiting mechanism to draw unsuspecting blacks into a false form of restored identity.<sup>254</sup> William Saunders Crowdy can be credited with teaching Black Americans that they had Israelite ancestry. Oddly enough Crowdy had his own Exodus experience. Crowdy

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<sup>252</sup> Eric Mason, *Urban Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 92.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

was born into slavery at the plantation in Charlotte Hall, Saint Mary's County, Maryland.<sup>255</sup> He eventually experienced liberation and participated in the Civil War as a teenager.<sup>256</sup> He later moved into a black town in Oklahoma. It was there, as the nation endured a horrific era of lynching and the rise of Jim Crow, that Crowdy had the revelation that African Americans were the descendants of the ancient Israelites.<sup>257</sup> Oklahoma became a promise land of sorts for many blacks fleeing the atrocities of the South. This settlement here was due in part to Edward P. McCabe. McCabe was a prominent Republican Party politician and state auditor in Kansas who became one of the most active promoters of black settlement in Oklahoma.<sup>258</sup>

Known as the birthplace of Oklahoma, the city of Guthrie attracted fifteen thousand people on the day of the opening of the Indian Territory, springing to life seemingly overnight.<sup>259</sup> The black migration served as a way for blacks to establish themselves without the control the white man from the South. Eventually Langston, Oklahoma, embodied the spirit of black racial solidarity and uplift that inspired both William S. Crowdy and, in another generation, the poet Langston Hughes.<sup>260</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Jacob S. Dorman, "This Is Our Red Sea": Exodusters, Prophet William Saunders Crowdy, and the Beginnings of Black Israelism." in *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>256</sup> Jacob S. Dorman, "This Is Our Red Sea": Exodusters, Prophet William Saunders Crowdy, and the Beginnings of Black Israelism." in *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 23.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>258</sup> Jacob S. Dorman, "This Is Our Red Sea": Exodusters, Prophet William Saunders Crowdy, and the Beginnings of Black Israelism." In *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 31.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

Black racial solidarity or uplifting the black community was a pressing issue for many former enslaved individuals. Many of the former enslaved had some understanding of the Exodus story. Many of them identified with the Hebrew slaves of the Bible, seeing parallels and inspiration in the biblical narrative of bondage and divine emancipation.<sup>261</sup> However, some slave owners would try to conceal that story. They did not want those enslaved to have hope in a deliverance. They also wanted to make sure accounts of slave revolts like the Haitian Revolution, never made it to the ears of the enslaved.<sup>262</sup> The way to control anyone is through the mind. The Bible says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,” (Phil. 2:5). The Bible also instructs one think upon, “whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report,” (Phil. 4:8). It was difficult for those enslaved to think about anything that was pure or lovely especially when they were subject to many aspects of abuse. Under those circumstances it would take a major ideological shift to allow an enslaved individual to see themselves as more than a slave. The Hebrew Israelite movement offered that change that would allow Blacks to view themselves as God’s chosen people.

The term Black Israelite speaks of an African American who holds the belief that the ancient Israelites were black and that they adhere to the laws written in the Bible.<sup>263</sup> For many this was nothing new. They believed Hebrew culture had spread into Africa long before

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<sup>261</sup> Christopher M. Driscoll, Anthony B. Pinn and Monica R. Miller, *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2019), 275.

<sup>262</sup> Matthew J. Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 18-19.

<sup>263</sup> Jacob S. Dorman, “Introduction.” In *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

slavery.<sup>264</sup> Thus, the argument was cogent that Africans brought to the West during the trans-Atlantic slave trade were Black Hebrews by religion, blood, and culture.<sup>265</sup> Following the Great Migration, when large numbers of African Americans migrated from southern states, religious teachers emerged that preached this belief.<sup>266</sup> There were three distinct periods for the spread of the Black Israelite movement. The first was within Protestant Christian Holiness churches in the 1890s, the second was following the First World War, and a third phase erupted during the civil rights and Black Power era of the 1960s.<sup>267</sup> Each period a different teaching would emerge due to its current leader. Most black Israelites believed in the message of Jesus Christ, but some expanded this into various versions of Judaism or Christianity, and Rastafarianism.<sup>268</sup>

The Black Israelite movement got its inspiration from the book of Genesis. Author Michael Barnett wrote a book entitled *The Rastafari Movement, A North American and Caribbean Perspective*. Barnett explains the ideology behind the use of Genesis 15:13-14. It reads:

“And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them: and they shall afflict them for four hundred years. And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance.”

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<sup>264</sup> Michael Barnett, *The Rastafari Movement: A North American and Caribbean Perspective* (London, Routledge, 2017), 131.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>266</sup> Christopher M. Driscoll, Anthony B. Pinn and Monica R. Miller, *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2019), 275.

<sup>267</sup> Jacob S. Dorman, “Introduction.” In *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.



Barnett details that the argument being made is that these verses refer to black people, given that they were taken from Africa and subjected to 400 years of slavery in the New World.<sup>269</sup> Barnett also adds the belief is that America, will be judged one day by God, and after that blacks will rise to a level of unchallenged prominence and greatness.<sup>270</sup>

Speaking of greatness Harlem, New York became the epicenter of Black Israelism, which was defined as much by its politics as by its prayers.<sup>271</sup> Pretty soon many Black Israelites welcomed the idea to settle in Ethiopia in 1930, hoping to create a refuge and a colony for African Americans.<sup>272</sup> A major catalyst was the alienation of blacks coupled with racism and a bustling urbanization.<sup>273</sup> The biblical land of Ethiopia become a source of hope and inspiration for Christians of African descent. That is because may saw a portion of Psalm 68 as a sign. It read, “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God,” (Psa. 68:31 KJV).

On the other hand, there were a myriad of incorrect views from this movement that stemmed from improper exegesis and hermeneutical applications. Case in point, Hebrew Israelites have an ethnocentric, Israelite-centered, law-oriented, and overly literal way of reading Scripture.<sup>274</sup> Eric Mason is the author of *Urban Apologetics Restoring Black Dignity with the*

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<sup>269</sup> Michael Barnett, *The Rastafari Movement: A North American and Caribbean Perspective* (London, Routledge, 2017), 133.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>271</sup> Jacob S. Dorman, “Our Only Hope, Our Only Salvation as a Race.” In *Chosen People: The Rise of American Black Israelite Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 113.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>274</sup> Eric Mason, *Urban Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 104.

*Gospel*. Mason points to several examples for Hebrew Israelites cite passages that suggest following the exile in Jeremiah, the Israelites were equated with the Gentiles therefore they could not be saved.<sup>275</sup> However, Mason says this account focuses on a judgement on Israel for their failure in representing God to the nations.<sup>276</sup> They also use key verses in Psalm 147 to build an argument of covenant exclusivity and that all salvation and biblical understanding belongs to Israel.<sup>277</sup> Many forget that God saved countless people in the Bible who were clearly not Hebrews. For instance, the Assyrians in Nineveh, Rahab, Lydia and the Roman centurion just to name a few. Finally, to Mason's point, they claim that Gentiles cannot be saved because Jesus instructs his disciples not to take the road that leads to the Gentiles.<sup>278</sup>

Identity is at the root of the Hebrew Israelite movement and embracing it becomes an act of resistance to an oppressive status quo.<sup>279</sup> To them being the people of Israel is more than a metaphor, it is literal truth.<sup>280</sup> In becoming Jews the Hebrew Israelites provide a lens into the intersecting worlds of African American religion and race.<sup>281</sup> As Jews this entitled the Hebrew Israelites to the promises God pronounced upon the Biblical children of Israelites. Some of those promises are detailed in the book of Deuteronomy:

Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that

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<sup>275</sup> Eric Mason, *Urban Apologetics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 102.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 106.

<sup>279</sup> Christopher M. Driscoll, Anthony B. Pinn and Monica R. Miller, *Kendrick Lamar and the Making of Black Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2019), 323.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup> And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God: “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country. “Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks. (Deut. 28:1-4).

Consequently, some within Judaism are not fans of this ideology. Many in the Jewish community feel that Hebrew Israelism is an appropriation of Jewish history and identity.<sup>282</sup> They also believe people those claiming to be Hebrew Israelites would be accepted if they would only convert like anyone else. Instead, Hebrew Israelites see this as gatekeeping and an unacceptable enforcing of whiteness as the normative Jewish identity, close to white supremacy.<sup>283</sup>

#### Generational Impact: Defending God’s Intent for Harmony &Unity

“I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly,” (John 10:10). One of Jesus’ often quoted Scriptures paints a picture of how he intended life to be. When one thinks about life, it encompasses, environment, family, personal property, and overall wellbeing. Jesus understood that division would eventually impact how someone lives day to day. Here in America that division is often based on socio-economic class but mostly colorism and race. As mentioned throughout this thesis colorism and race fueled the false exegesis of the Noahic curse.

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<sup>282</sup> Michael T. Miller, “Black Judaism(s) and the Hebrew Israelites,” *Religion Compass*, Volume 13, Issue 1 (2019): 6. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/rec3.12346>.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown argued that the dynamics of honor and shame in antebellum readings of Noah's curse intended to defend the institution of slavery.<sup>284</sup> Wyatt-Brown argued that proslavery readings of the curse were rooted in a pair of crucial premises: that slaves are debased persons and that as the eponymous ancestor of Africans, Ham embodies the dishonorable condition of black slaves.<sup>285</sup> Ultimately the brutality of slavery and the failures thereafter meant many blacks, lost all hope of peaceful coexistence between themselves and white Americans.<sup>286</sup> However even though the Bible was weaponized as a means for slavery, that same Bible has the answer to the racial divide that stems from slavery.

The Bible documents the account of Cornelius a Roman Centurion. Acts chapter ten indicates that Cornelius was a man who feared God and gave alms to the poor. In a vision Peter was told to head to Caesarea where he would eventually minister to Cornelius. Peter was concerned about the appearance of the visit because it was unlawful for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation (Acts 10:28). Jews had strict dietary /lifestyle regulations that kept them from eating and associating with Gentiles.

Nonetheless, the centurion encounter with Peter was about God demonstrating to the world that all races and nationalities are one. After Peter got to Cornelius' house Peter says, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him," (Acts 10:35). Peter learned that God did not divide his people by upper, middle, or lower class. He also understood that God did not have a hierarchy when it

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<sup>284</sup> Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 26.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>286</sup> Alphonso Pinkney, "The Black Nationalist Tradition." *In Red Black and Green: Black Nationalism in the United States* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), 18.

came to ethnicity. Jews were not more important than Gentiles or vice versa. As a matter of fact, as Peter was speaking to the crowd at Cornelius' house, the Holy Spirit fell upon those who heard the Word of the Lord. This endowment of the Spirit shocked those who were of the circumcision because the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles also (Acts 10:45). As one juxtaposes this to black treatment during the slavery era, one can see that the Lord's intent is for all to come to know him. Knowing Christ means there should be no inhumane treatment to a neighbor because God loves all mankind.

Again, cultural, and ethnic discrimination was not uncommon in the New Testament. The New Testament includes an account of the disciples having to address this very issue. As the gospel continued to spread so did the congregation. At one point there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists. Hellenism refers to the civilization, culture, customs, and lifestyle of Ancient Greece.<sup>287</sup> Depending on the Bible translation Hellenists were said to be Grecian or Grecian Jews. The Hellenists complained because their widows were being "neglected during the daily distribution," (Acts 6:1). This daily distribution was a time where the widows would receive food. Based on these Scriptures we have two groups who are considered Jews.

However due to differences in lifestyle and customs their widows were treated differently. To deal with this social issue, seven men from among the disciples were chosen to be deacons. These deacons were to help solve the injustice based on the Holy Spirit and the wisdom that they displayed. This account demonstrates that the Holy Spirit can teach people how to deal with inequality in a righteous way. This story can serve as a model when it comes to dealing with

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<sup>287</sup> Merrill Tenney and Moises Silva, *The Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2009), s.v. "Hellenism"

unfairness. The best course of action is to allow the Holy Spirit and not personal bias or agendas to lead the way.

Part of God's plan to get mankind back to righteousness is the act of reconciliation. According to the New Bible Dictionary reconciliation deals with the doing away of an enmity, the bridging over a quarrel. By nature the definition of reconciliation is needed to right a wrong. The false narrative that the Black race was subjected to a debased style of living negates the Word of God. Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," (Matt. 22:39).

There is no ambiguity when it comes to the word love in Scriptures. The Bible lists a host of factors for love. It includes not acting rudely, thinks no evil and rejoices in the truth just to name a few (1 Cor. 13:4-7). Unfortunately, there are a variety of historical documents that reveal that some Christians did not exhibit love during the slavery era. For instance, the Ku Klux Klan were very open about being Christian. Author Kelly Baker wrote a book entitled *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America*. Baker explains that their, "destiny included patriotic duty, uniformity in Protestant Christianity and white supremacy."<sup>288</sup> However the recorded lynchings, cross burnings, and violence towards black people, does not adhere to the love defined in the Bible. The same is true for the mindset that encapsulated many of their members. Kelly Baker illustrates this point by adding a quote from a KKK pamphlet:

We avow the distinction between the races of mankind as same has been decreed by the Creator, and shall be ever true in the faithful maintenance of White Supremacy and will strenuously oppose any compromise thereof in any and all things.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (University Press of Kansas, 2017), 80.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

The Bible instructs believers to no longer regard people according to the flesh (2 Cor. 5:16). When the scriptures talk about flesh, it is a direct correlation to the wickedness that stems from an unrepentant heart. An unrepentant heart will allow hatred to abide and blossom in one's life. Based on historical accounts it is evident that those Christian slave owners and proslavery advocates embraced the sin of the flesh. That embrace was focused on controlling and debasing the lives of those with black or brown skin. Likewise, the flesh also deals with someone's physical appearance.

The Bible says that man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. During slavery times the physical appearance of black people, stirred up strong disdain in the hearts of some. The false narrative of the curse of Ham has played a factor in these actions as mentioned throughout this thesis. For instance, as previously stated, John Henry Hopkins believed that the African race should be subject to slavery not freedom.<sup>290</sup> The Bible says, "that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers," (3 John 1:2). On the other hand, it is obvious that enslaved individuals were often tormented, and prosperity of soul was difficult to affirm.

Nevertheless, Second Corinthians chapter five offers insight into embracing God's intent for unity and harmony. The scripture reads in part, "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation," (2 Cor. 5:18). Through reconciliation many enslaved individuals and those proslavery can begin a healing process. The above-mentioned scripture shows that in Christ Jesus a bridge reconnecting to unity has already been made. The Lord knew in his infinite wisdom that there

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<sup>290</sup> Kevin Burrell, "Slavery, the Hebrew Bible and the Development of Racial Theories in the Nineteenth Century." *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 742. DOI:10.3390/rel12090742.

would be quarrels among his people due to sin. That sin is racism and the lies spoken in the name of Christ to uplift that evil ideology.

As an illustration, visualize this pseudo workplace scenario. Say someone who works for company X, blatantly disregards the company handbook as it relates to employee conduct. This employee then treats store customers with the utmost disrespect by spewing out expletives and racial epithets. Company X is then slapped with a lawsuit by a dozen customers due to the inhumane treatment they received. That company ultimately must dish out billions for compensatory damages. The sad part is that the overall company does not stand for this type immoral and wicked behavior. Yet, the actions of a few resulted in a major blow to the company.

Likewise, this what some Christians did with the Bible. Although people mischaracterized and weaponized the Bible, that did not mean that they represented the fullness of God. God's ministry of reconciliation includes using his word as the plumbline and outlook for life. Reconciliation can only work by accepting Christ's finished work on the cross. That includes being cleansed by his blood. For it is written, "how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God"? (Heb. 9:14). It is only through the blood of Christ that one can walk in righteousness. That righteousness is what stands regardless of what society, economical structures, or ideologies say. God's intent was that all people regardless of skin color would live in harmony. The Bible says:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity (Eph. 2:14-16).



## Conclusion

“And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,” (Acts 17:26). According to the Bible all mankind comes from one creative source. That source is Elohim. Elohim is the Hebrew word for God in his capacity as the Creator. When God created mankind, he created different tribes, nations, people and skin tones. The diversity of God’s creation has been an issue for hundreds of years. One clear issue has been the justification of the Black race to be enslaved all due to the false interpretation of the so-called curse of Ham.

As previously mentioned, the false interpretation claimed that the Black race were to be slaves and the lowest of God’s creation. Therefore, these individuals were subjected to inhuman treatment for generations. Slavery was a major development that resulted due to the false exegesis of Hebraic Scriptures. Those with dark flesh were bound to this dehumanizing institution. This institution produced an unbelievable amount of money for the economy. But it was all on the backs and lives of those of African descent. The Bible tells us that, “With your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth,” (Rev. 5:9b-10). Instead of being royal priests on earth, blacks were viewed as chattel and replaceable chess pieces. Author Andrew Curran adds to this point by stating an ideology that was prominent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:

The black race has always seemed mentally rather inferior to other races and, regardless of the care that may be taken to educate young nègres, they have never produced a man of great genius they will always be in servitude by their weakness, and in barbarism by their inability to think.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Andrew S. Curran, *The Anatomy of Blackness: Science and Slavery in an Age of Enlightenment* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 167.

The debasement of the Black race was fueled by an improper understanding of a portion of Genesis chapter 9. It reads:

“So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him. Then he said: Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants, He shall be to his brethren. And he said: “Blessed be the LORD, The God of Shem, And may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, And may he dwell in the tents of Shem; And may Canaan be his servant,” (Gen. 9:24-27).

As some read the alleged curse, many overlooked it was addressed to Canaan. Again, Noah said, “Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servant He shall be to his brethren,” (Gen. 9:25). Thus from colonial times, it was widely recognized that the Bible was a crux for the justification of forced servitude.<sup>292</sup> Aforementioned abolitionist named Samuel Sewall issued a griping understanding of the Noahic curse. Author Stephen Haynes noted that Sewall observed that deriving a curse on Ham violated the natural meaning of the text.<sup>293</sup> According to Haynes Sewall noted the following:

“That by cursory reading, this Text may have been mistaken. For Canaan is the Person Cursed three times over, without the mentioning of Cham. Good Expositors suppose the Curse entailed on him, and that this Prophesie was accomplished in the Extirpation of the Canaanites, and in the Servitude of the Gibeonites.<sup>294</sup>

Sewall surmises that the scriptural hermeneutic focuses only on Canaan. As one deciphers the scripture it is very compelling based on the context of what was spoken that Noah was speaking directly to Canaan. In the same account it is revealed that Ham was the father of Canaan. The

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<sup>292</sup> Stephen R. Haynes. "Challenging the Curse: Readings and Counterreadings." In *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 5.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

word Ham was later understood to be related to the Hebrew word for black or brown.<sup>295</sup> This dubious assertion became the fuel needed to pedal a lie not consistent with scriptures. The lie bound those with darker flesh to generational trauma.

It is clear from scriptures that this should not be. The Bible says, “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth,” (Acts 17:26). This means that through Adam the entire human race was formed. This includes very color, nationality, and background. Because all races come from the same person Adam, God’s intent is that “men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us,” (Acts 17:27). Finding God and possessing his nature helps to eradicate supremacy and loathe for another due to skin tone differences. God’s hand of creation always points back to him. One writer eloquently explains this point. “As in every form of the inorganic universe we see some noble variation of God’s thought and beauty, so in each separate man, in each separate race, something of the absolute is incarnated.”<sup>296</sup>

The absence of the teachings of the Black contribution to the faith is not just a hermeneutical injustice. It is also a lie of omission that continues to perpetuate an ideology that those from Africa had no part in forming Christian history and theology. Again, if it were not for Tertullian an African born man, apologetics would be lacking some key foundational understandings. Tertullian is recognized as the father of Latin theology and was the first to use the term Trinity also trinitas in his writings.<sup>297</sup> His theology of the Holy Spirit was before his

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<sup>295</sup> David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, (Princeton University Press, 2005), 143.

<sup>296</sup> Manning Marable and Leith Mullings, *Let Nobody Turn Us Around: An African American Anthology* (California: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 164, ProQuest Ebrary.

<sup>297</sup> David L. Eastman, *Early North African Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 58.

time. Author Dr. David Eastman wrote a book entitled *Early North African Christianity*. Dr. Eastman describes the importance of Tertullian's theology. He states, "Unfortunately, over one hundred years after this African theologian offered his explanation of the nature of the Trinity ... other parts of the church were still struggling with his basic truth."<sup>298</sup> Dr. Eastman also points out that Tertullian argued that attempts to reason our way to God through Philosophy, instead of through Scripture lead to heresy.<sup>299</sup>

Perhaps the most influential theologian to contribute to the Christian experience was Augustine of Hippo and yes he was born in Africa. Augustine argued for the doctrine of original sin, which teaches humans are sinful at conception due to Adam and Eve's guilt.<sup>300</sup> Augustine also developed a relational model for understanding the Trinity and teaching that the Kingdom of God was not an earthly one.<sup>301</sup> Lastly Augustine's framework set up theological debates on grace and free will that continue to this present day! As can be seen these men and others helped to develop the foundation and theological structure of the church. Again, they were African, and these contributions were noted centuries before the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. Therefore, the notion that Christianity was introduced to Africans where they were kidnapped and brought to America is blatantly false.

The same can be said about the black presence in the Bible. The same slaver traders who weaponized the Bible for slavery had no idea that darker skinned individuals were devoted to God in Scriptures. Most black and brown individuals in scriptures were known as the Cushites.

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<sup>298</sup> David L. Eastman, *Early North African Christianity*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 63.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

As was mentioned in chapter two, “Cushites were known through Egyptian and Assyrian epigraphy as a dark-skinned people with features consistent with modern notions of negroes.”<sup>302</sup> One Cushite in the Bible who stood for righteousness was named Phinehas. God bestowed a covenant of an everlasting priesthood him and his family for his devotion to God. Phinehas’ name translates as the Negro, the Nubian or the Cushite.<sup>303</sup>

Significantly, new research shows that darker pigmentation was established in the Garden of Eden. Dr. David DeWitt has been a biomedical scientist for more than 25 years. He also serves as the Dean of Science Programs at Columbia International University. He researched the age-old question of what color was Adam? Dr. DeWitt based his research on different color pigments called eumelanin and pheomelanin.<sup>304</sup> Dr. DeWitt concluded that there were also special cells at play to produce skin color. His research surmised that Adam and Eve likely had higher levels of melanin production and thus had darker skin. So instead of loving black brothers and sisters some Christians symbolically murdered them like Cain did Abel.

Unfortunately, the inhuman treatment of blacks resulted in black churches being formed, Nation of Islam and the Hebrew Israelites Movement becoming a force for black identity. Author Eric Lincoln summarizes this point:

When it became clear that the white man's Christianity could not or would not afford the inclusive cover human dignity required, it was obvious that some other modus vivendi would have to be discovered or invented. But except for the church, slavery provided no institutional opportunities even remotely available to black dignification, and the

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<sup>302</sup> Rodney S. Sadler, *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?: An Examination of Race, Ethnicity, and Othering in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomsbury Academic & Professional, 2009), 16.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>304</sup> Dr. David DeWitt, “What Color Was Adam,” *Answers in Genesis* (2021). <https://answersingenesis.org/genetics/what-color-adam/>.

prevailing image of the church was of a white institution substantially accommodated to black debasement.<sup>305</sup>

In summary, the Bible, Christian theology, and Christian history, all illustrate the achievements and contributions of those from the Hamitic line. To continue to propagate the so-called curse of Ham is show contempt for the scriptures and history. After all, God's intent was for all mankind to walk in love and unity. That unity will soon be displayed because the Bible says, "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb," (Rev. 7:9).

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<sup>305</sup> Eric Lincoln, *Coming Through the Fire: Surviving Race and Place in America* (Duke University Press, 1996), 106.

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