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From every people and nation

A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
OF RACE

J. Daniel Hays



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To my parents, Jim and Carolyn Hays, who taught me from an early age that all people are created equal;

To the Black and Hispanic students of Central Junior High, Alamogordo, NM, 1966–69, who taught me the basics – not only the problems but also possible solutions – of the race issue in North America;

And to my students at Ouachita Baptist University. May their generation be the one that truly overcomes racial division in the North American Church.

Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: 1. the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g. historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); 2. the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and 3. the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of the scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

This volume combines fine technical scholarship on complex matters of history and race with a prophetic call to Christians to abjure racism. On the one hand, it traces out much of what the Bible says about the diversity of races and cultures, against the background of Ancient Near Eastern social history (its treatment of the 'curse of Ham' is particularly penetrating and convincing); on the other, it exposes some of the glib, unbiblical, and frankly immoral stances that not only characterize a fair bit of Western scholarship, but continue to surface in our attitudes and relationships. Dr J. Daniel Hays is able simultaneously to make us long for the new heaven and the new earth, when men and women from every tongue and tribe and people

SERIES PREFACE

and nation will gather around the One who sits on the throne and around the Lamb, and to cause us to blush with shame when we recognize afresh that the church of Jesus Christ is to be already an outpost of that consummated kingdom in this fallen world. This book deserves the widest circulation and the most thoughtful reading, for it corrects erroneous scholarship while calling Christians to reform sinful attitudes. If the book is sometimes intense, it is because the problems it addresses are not trivial.

D. A. Carson
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Author's preface

My pilgrimage along the road of racial strife and racial reconciliation has been an interesting and educational one. My father was an Air Force Chaplain, so I grew up on numerous military bases around the country. In the 1960s, military bases were the most integrated communities in all of America. Air Force families were segregated, but we were segregated by the rank of our fathers, and not by race. We did not have a swimming pool for Blacks and a pool for Whites, as most of the South had at that time (if they had a pool for Blacks at all). Rather, we had a pool for officers and a pool for enlisted men. Blacks and Whites swam together. Blacks and Whites also went to the same school, to the same church, to the same commissary (supermarket), to the same bowling alley, to the same movie theatre, and so on. We played on the same Little League teams, camped with the same Boy Scout Troop, and lived in the same neighbourhoods. All Majors, White or Black, lived in houses of exactly the same size and with exactly the same floor plans. The Colonels lived in larger houses and the Captains lived in smaller ones. As a child and as an adolescent, I was always stunned at the different world that existed off the base, where often a railroad track or a certain highway segregated American towns into Black towns and White towns, with their own Black Churches and White Churches.

In Junior High we were living in New Mexico, and I went to the regular publicly funded school in town. At that time there were two Junior High Schools in town. One was made up of White kids only. The composition of the other one, where I went to school, was approximately 33% Black, 33% Hispanic, and 33% Military kids ('Base Brats', as we were called). During my senior year of High School, Dad transferred to South Carolina, and I entered a school there that was in its very first year of integration. Later I attended State Universities (Auburn and NMSU), went to seminary, and married a wonderful girl from Dallas.

My wife and I followed the Lord's call into missions and from 1982

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until 1987 we lived in southern Ethiopia in a town called Dilla. Within a fifty-mile radius of Dilla there were probably 500,000 people, of which perhaps fifteen were White. We worked closely with the local Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church and made close friends with our Ethiopian counterparts.

In 1988 we were back in the USA, where I entered a PhD programme. In addition to my standard Old Testament seminars, I took two Ethics seminars under Dr Bill Tillman, who introduced me to the race relations history – or lack thereof – in our own denomination (Southern Baptist). He also introduced me to the legacy of ethicist T. B. Maston, who had spent much of his academic life fighting against racism and prejudice within the Southern Baptist Convention. In 1959 Maston wrote *The Bible and Race*, and said many of the same things that I say in this book. However, he wrote to a Church that simply was not listening to him. Maston's experience brings to my mind the haunting final line in the old Don MacLean song 'Vincent': 'They would not listen; they're not listening still. Perhaps they never will.'

After we came to Ouachita Baptist University, I was given a nudge by one of its alumni – a Black pastor from Arlington, Texas, named Dwight McKissic – to study the Cushites, the Black Africans that appear frequently in the Bible. During my study of the Cushites I was startled to notice how much the Bible does actually say about race, and how little White-dominated theological scholarship has acknowledged this, or even attempted to address the issue. Thus the idea for this book began to form in my head.

In addition to Bill Tillman and Dwight McKissic, I have many others to thank. I thank D. A. Carson, the editor of the *New Studies in Biblical Theology* series, for accepting this proposal and giving valuable editorial input on this project. Likewise my thanks go to Philip Duce at IVP in Leicester, UK, for all his editorial assistance. I am thankful to Ouachita Baptist University (OBU) for giving me sabbatical leave during the spring semester of 2002 to work on this book. I also want to express my sincere appreciation to OBU's Research Librarian, Janice Ford, for her invaluable help. Several OBU undergraduate student workers – Aaron Lemay, Ryan Owsley, and Julie Bradley – assisted me during the summers of 2001 and 2002, and I thank them as well. I have an outstanding group of colleagues here at OBU, and many of them have helped me on this project in some manner or other, especially through their encouragement and supportive friendship. Thus my deep appreciation goes out

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to Scott Duvall, Preben Vang, Randy Richards, Marvin Pate, Terry Carter, Dennis Tucker, Isaac Mwase, Byron Eubanks, Barbara Pemberton, and Bill Viser. In addition, my parents, Jim and Carolyn Hays, have been a constant source of encouragement throughout this project; Dad even helped proofread several chapters. Finally, I want to thank my wife, Donna, for all of her patience and unwavering support. The writing effort required to produce this book equates to a large number of needed household projects that I have never completed.

Danny Hays

Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
<i>AJA</i>	<i>American Journal of Archaeology</i>
<i>AnBib</i>	<i>Analecta Biblica</i>
ANE	Ancient Near East
<i>ATJ</i>	<i>African Theology Journal</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BBC	Broadman Bible Commentary
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BES</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Egyptian Seminar</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BkNTC	Black's New Testament Commentary
BNTC	Baker New Testament Commentary
<i>BR</i>	<i>Bible Review</i>
<i>BST</i>	<i>The Bible Speaks Today</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CAH</i>	<i>Cambridge Ancient History</i>
CB	The Cambridge Bible
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTM</i>	<i>Concordia Theological Monthly</i>
<i>EncJud</i>	<i>Encyclopedia Judaica</i>
FOTL	Forms of the Old Testament Literature
Gk	Greek
<i>HAR</i>	<i>Harvard Annual Review</i>
Heb	Hebrew
HTKNT	Herders Theologische Kommentar zum Neuen Testament

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IDB</i>	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
ITC	International Theological Commentary
IVPNTC	InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary Series
<i>JARCE</i>	<i>Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEA</i>	<i>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JRT</i>	<i>Journal of Religious Thought</i>
<i>JSJPHRP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period</i>
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSS	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KJV	King James (Authorized) Version
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
<i>MTZ</i>	<i>Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCB	New Century Bible Commentary
NIBC	New International Biblical Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
NLB	New Living Bible
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology

ABBREVIATIONS

OTL	Old Testament Library
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
SBLSCS	Society of Biblical Literature Septuagint and Cognate Studies
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
<i>TDOT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
TNTC	Tyndale New Testament Commentary
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WEC	Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary
WstBC	Westminster Bible Companion
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

Chapter One

Introduction

Not long ago, in a conversation with my colleague Dr Isaac Mwase, a Black professor and pastor of a local Black congregation, I mentioned that the race problem was *an* important issue for the Church today. Isaac quickly corrected me by stating emphatically that it is *the* most important issue for the Church today. This conversation illustrates to some degree a phenomenon that I encountered regularly as I read through some of the recent literature dealing with the race problem in the Church today.¹ Black scholars identify the racial division in the Church as one of the most central problems for contemporary Christianity, while many White scholars are saying, ‘What problem?’

Likewise, even among those who acknowledge the problem, there is a wide difference of opinion concerning just how bad the problem is and whether the situation is improving or deteriorating. On the one hand, in recent years tremendous progress appears to have been achieved. Carson, for example, documents evangelical churches on the east coast and the west coast of North America that are doing a remarkable job of integrating (2002: 95–96). Particularly among many White Christians, there is the perception that in these regions things have improved; even in the south and the mid-west many feel that, although lagging behind the rest of the country, the race problem is not nearly as pronounced as it was a mere generation ago.

On the other hand, some have observed that the evidence for this perception is often anecdotal, and actual statistical survey data appear to suggest otherwise. Emerson and Smith in *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (2000) study the problem through statistical data based on actual nationwide surveys and interviews. They point out that there is a tremendous disparity between the way that White evangelicals view the problem and

¹ See the excellent bibliography in Sharp (2002: 304–314), and especially the works he cites in his footnote on pages 236–237.

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the way that Black evangelicals view the problem. They also note that this phenomenon cuts across regional lines. Their studies indicate that two-thirds of White Christians believe that the situation for Blacks is improving, while two-thirds of Black Christians believe that the situation for Blacks is deteriorating (88). The survey data have led Emerson and Smith to pessimistic conclusions. They write:

Despite the often very best intentions of most white American evangelicals, the complex web of factors explored in this book produce a rather dismal portrait of the realities of and prospects for positive race relations among American Christians in the United States. Most white evangelicals, directed by their cultural tools, fail to recognize the institutionalization of racialization – in economic, political, educational, social, and religious systems . . . Is the situation hopeless? If white evangelicals continue to travel the same road they have travelled thus far, the future does indeed look bleak (170).

Emerson and Smith (2000: 171) also suggest that one of the underlying factors hindering evangelicalism's ability to address the race issue adequately is that evangelicals have a tendency to define problems in simple terms and to look for simple solutions. The race issue, on the other hand, is extremely complex, involving history, tradition, culture, religion, economics, politics, and a host of other factors.² Emerson and Smith state: 'With a few exceptions, evangelicals lack serious thinking on this issue.' Black theologian Ronald Potter makes the same point, writing that 'there exists little if any theological reflection' on this problem (1997: 32).³

² For discussion on the complexity of the racial issue, see Carson (2002: 87–108) and Sharp (2002). This complexity likewise surfaces in Emerson and Smith's conclusions. Their study indicates that Whites tend to see the race problem in individual terms (how does one person feel about another person of a different race?). On the other hand, Blacks usually see the problem as extending beyond the individual to societal structures, a much more complicated situation (2000: 88–91; 170–173). Fields (2001: 67–69) identifies the same problem, labelling it as 'systemic sin'. Both Fields and Emerson/Smith suggest that limited success in dealing with the race problem in the Evangelical Church will occur unless Evangelicals engage with the societal structural problem as well as with the individual attitude problem.

³ The history of how White Christianity, and in particular American evangelicalism, has dealt with the race issue throughout the twentieth century is beyond the scope of this book. However, in summary one can say that the actions of evangelicalism toward racial issues for much of the twentieth century were highly questionable, to say the least. See, for example, the discussion of how *Christianity Today* opposed the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s (Dorrien 1998: 154). Dorrien also quotes Moberg (1972:

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Although there are some significant exceptions, in general there is silence in White evangelical congregations concerning the biblical teaching on this issue. Within these congregations, the current attitude of many Whites often falls into one of three categories. First, some people are still entrenched in their inherited racism. They are interested in the Bible if it reinforces their prejudiced views; otherwise they do not care what the Bible says about race. Second, many people assume that the Bible simply does not speak to the race issue, and particularly to the Black–White issue. Third, many others are simply indifferent to the problem, assuming that the status quo is acceptable and that the Bible supports their current practices.

These views appear to carry over into academia as well. Indeed, evangelical biblical and theological scholarship has continued to remain nearly silent on this issue, even though the indications of the scope of the problem are obvious. Few of our theological training institutions address the race issue, which is rather strange, considering the scale of the problem. Indeed, the traditional Systematic Theologies used for most of the twentieth century did not address the race issue at all. Often these volumes had entire chapters devoted to philosophical and biblical discussions of ‘Anthropology’ (the study of the nature of humankind), but they failed to address one of the central anthropological problems within the Church today. Likewise they contained entire chapters on ‘Ecclesiology’ (the study of the Church), but did not address the major division in Church life today. A few of the more recent volumes, however, have at least begun to address the issue. Millard Erickson, for example, in *Christian Theology* (1985: 542–545), presents a good discussion of the race issue. Wayne Grudem, in *Systematic Theology* (1994: 450, 459) while not discussing race as an issue, does at least mention racial equality as an implication of being created in the image of God and also as the practical outworking of Galatians 3:27–28. Yet other influential theologies, such as Alister McGrath’s *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (1997), are silent on race. Even Stanley Grenz’s *Theology for the Community of God* with its emphasis on ‘the community of God’, fails to address the race problem.⁴ Meanwhile, over twenty-three

42–43) as stating that ‘evangelicalism had become synonymous with the defense of racial privilege’.

⁴ Grenz (2000: 466) comes close, touching on the issue in his discussion of ‘the Nation of God’. He writes, ‘No longer is status as God’s nation based on membership within a specific ethnic group. Now people from the entire world are called together to belong to God; the church is an international fellowship comprising persons “from

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million Black American Christians, most of them extremely conservative in theology, feel excluded from the White evangelical 'community of God' that is teaching and studying these theologies. We clearly have a problem that needs addressing; yet much of evangelical theology has, in general, ignored it.⁵

On the positive side, however, it should be noted that several helpful books addressing 'racial reconciliation' have been published recently, containing articles written by both Black and White authors. Two significant examples are *The Gospel in Black and White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation*, edited by D. Okholm at Wheaton College (1997); and *A Mighty Long Journey: Reflections on Racial Reconciliation*, edited by T. George and R. Smith at Beeson Divinity School (2000). E. Yamauchi is producing helpful background studies dealing with Blacks in the Ancient Near East.⁶ Also, G. Usry (a Black pastor) and C. Keener (a White professor of New Testament) have together written several important works, focusing primarily on Black audiences.⁷ In addition, several other Black scholars and pastors have produced helpful works related to the race issue (Felder, McKissic, Fields, A. T. Evans, and Adamo, to name a few).⁸

In the field of biblical studies the response of scholars has been mixed. As discussed later in the book, many commentators continue to make the same incorrect and prejudiced assumptions that their predecessors made, thus repeating the same errors concerning race as those made by earlier generations. However, in contrast, several commentators, especially those writing in series that are concerned with applicational theology, have confronted the race problem seriously and honestly. Good examples include J. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (1979); K. Snodgrass, *Ephesians*,

every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9)'. Yet when writing about the Church as community, Grenz (2000: 482) states: 'It is a community of shared commitment to Christ transcending spatial, temporal, social, and gender boundaries'. Conspicuously missing from this list is the ethnic or racial boundary.

⁵ One of the few contemporary White theologians to address the race issue in a serious theological work is Sharp (2002).

⁶ Edwin Yamauchi, ed., *Africa and Africans in Antiquity* (2001b); Edwin Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (forthcoming).

⁷ Glenn Usry and Craig S. Keener, *Black Man's Religion: Can Christianity be Afrocentric?* (1996); Keener and Usry, *Defending Black Faith: Answers to Tough Questions about African-American Christianity* (1997).

⁸ Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters: Race, Class, and Family* (1989); William Dwight McKissic, *Beyond Roots* (1990); Bruce L. Fields, *Introducing Black Theology* (2001); Anthony T. Evans, *Let's Get to Know Each Other* (1995); David Tuesday Adamo, *Africa and Africans in the Old Testament* (1998).

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NIVAC (1996); and S. McKnight, *Galatians*, NIVAC (1995). Also, one of the few works that deals with the biblical text on the race issue is the brief work by S. L. McKenzie, *All God's Children: A Biblical Critique of Racism* (1997).

The silence on the race issue among evangelical scholars, therefore, is gradually being broken, although it is still present in many of the major theological textbooks that our universities and seminaries are using to train tomorrow's leaders. In addition, although helpful articles on reconciliation are being produced, very little serious biblically based exegetical work is being conducted on passages that are relevant to the race issue.

This book, which is far from exhaustive, is an attempt to help fill the need for a serious exegetically based study of passages that relate to the race issue. It is subtitled *A Biblical Theology of Race* because I am also trying to build upon this exegetical work a relevant biblical theology.

In this book I am not seeking to employ some new 'agenda-driven' hermeneutic. My approach to studying Scripture and developing theology follows standard historical-critical method, based on evangelical presuppositions regarding the nature of the Bible. Part of this method, however, is to identify the cultural baggage or culturally tainted lenses through which we tend to read Scripture. Thorough historical study and careful exegesis can help all of us to mute the influence of the culturally slanted or 'ethnocentric' context from which we read. Likewise, listening to other perspectives from other contexts can help us to critique our own understanding. Obviously we will never be completely free of our contextual location in a culture, but a serious study of Scripture will demand that we at least attempt to set our cultural baggage aside in order to let Scripture speak to us clearly.⁹

In this book we will first explore the ethnic historical context of the Old Testament (Chapter 2) and then examine those texts that relate to race in the rest of the Old Testament (Chapters 3–6). Next we will examine the ethnic world of the New Testament (Chapter 7), followed by a study of relevant texts throughout the New Testament (Chapters 8–9). Thus we will begin in Genesis and end in Revelation.

⁹ My hermeneutical approach is explained in detail in Duvall and Hays (2001). See especially the introductory chapter ('The Interpretive Journey', 19–27) and the chapter on ethnocentric reading ('What Do We Bring to the Text?', 85–94). Taking a similar approach to the problem of ethnocentric interpretation is Craffert (1996: 449–468).

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In Chapter 10 I will present a concluding synthesis and offer a final applicational challenge.

We will explore two types of texts. First, we will examine those texts that have a *general* bearing on the theology of race: that is, texts that speak to the universal aspects of race. Second, because I am particularly concerned with the relationship between Black and White Christians in the Church today, we will explore those texts that make *specific* reference to Black Africans. Taken together, these passages will provide the biblical basis for a strong, clear theology of race.

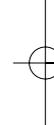
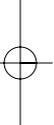
As mentioned earlier, because the Black–White race issue is so gigantic in the American Church, this work will focus on that particular problem. However, I have spent enough of my life overseas to know that racial problems are endemic to most parts of the world, and are not limited to black and white skin colour. Serious ethnic tensions are not limited to North America, but also exist in the Church all across Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. The recent influx of Eastern Europeans into Western Europe has created racial tensions in many European Churches. In Asia, serious cultural tensions, which can often flare up into racism, exist between Japanese, Koreans, and Chinese. The two-million-strong Myanmar (formerly Burma) Baptist Convention is made up of dozens of ethnic groups, many with completely different languages. Many African national church organizations, such as the 4,000-plus congregations of the evangelical Ethiopian Kale Heywet Church, comprise numerous different ethnic groups that traditionally and historically have felt animosity toward each other. In some regions of the world, Christians of different ethnic groups have recently opposed each other in open war. Often such warfare was fought along ethnic lines, thus creating deep animosity and prejudices.

Thus throughout the world Christian communities are struggling to overcome the historical and cultural prejudices that they have inherited and are striving to use the gospel to forge Christian unity in the midst of their cultural diversity. So while I have attempted to apply the theology developed in this book to the Black–White issue in the United States, the biblical principles that emerge have equal applicability in any Church setting where fellow believers in Christ are being pressured culturally to divide along ethnic lines and to embrace prejudiced views toward other ethnic groups.

Related to this is the observation that Christianity is currently multiplying rapidly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, but not in the West. Woodward (2001: 48) points out that in 1900 over 80% of the

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Christians in the world were in Europe or North America. Today that percentage has dropped to 40%, highlighting the fact that the majority of Christians in the world today are not in Europe or North America. Furthermore, in many of these areas, especially Africa, Christianity is growing at a phenomenal rate, while in the West growth has stagnated. The forecast for the next century is for this trend to continue or even to accelerate. As the twenty-first century progresses, a greater and greater majority of Christians of all denominations in the world will be non-Western. As the world continues to shrink, and as Christians from hundreds of different ethnic groups from around the world come into contact with each other, it will be imperative that we have a proper biblical foundation for dealing with such a world.



Chapter Two

The ethnic make-up of the Old Testament world

Introduction

One of the more difficult hurdles for us to overcome in developing and applying biblical theology from the Scriptures is the ever-constant intrusion of 'cultural pre-understanding' into our interpretative and applicational process. 'Cultural pre-understanding' is the tendency for us to interpret the biblical material through the lenses of our own personal cultural context. Not only do we fill in all the literary 'gaps' in the biblical story with material from our culture, but also we tend to project much of our culture into the setting and into our understanding of the characters.¹ Not all of this projection is bad, for it can often help us to relate better to the text. However, frequently such 'cultural pre-understanding' leads us to skew the text to fit our particular ethnocentric cultural outlook.

For centuries, in art as well as in other media, the people of Western Europe and North America have portrayed the individuals in the Bible as Europeans or North Americans. Thus not only does Michelangelo paint twelve Europeans sitting down at a European table for the Last Supper, but the fair-haired American Charlton Heston portrays Moses in *The Ten Commandments* and the blue-eyed Briton Richard Harris plays the title role in TNT's television movie *Abraham*. Even though most scholars know that few, if any, characters in the Old Testament looked much like Charlton Heston or Richard Harris,² the average church member – indeed, probably the average pastor – consciously or subconsciously assumes as much. Such images play powerful roles in shaping popular perceptions about the Bible, and these popular perceptions in turn have a serious impact on the theology of the Church.

¹ See the discussion in Duvall and Hays (2001: 85–94) and Brett (1996: 3–22).

² Perhaps Uriah the Hittite or Goliath the Philistine had Caucasian features, but probably none of the Israelites did. See the discussion below.

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Furthermore, not only are North American or European images projected back on the people of the Bible, but also clear portrayals of Black Africans in the Bible are all but ignored. This 'marginalization' of Black African presence is perpetrated, consciously or subconsciously, not only by the popularizers of Christianity, but also by serious scholars. 'Cultural pre-understanding' apparently influences many of us in the academic guild even though we often piously claim to be historically objective.

A good example of this subtle – and probably subconscious – bias can be found in scholarly discussions about the people of the biblical world.³ For example, the kingdom of Cush, discussed below, was a Black African kingdom along the Nile River just south of Egypt. The terms *Cush* or *Cushite* appear 54 times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament, indicating that the Cushites, an African people, played a fairly significant role in the Old Testament story. The term *Hittite* or *Hittites* (an Indo-European group) is similar in frequency, occurring 61 times (although ten of the occurrences refer to the same person, Uriaah the Hittite). The terms *Arab*, *Arabs*, or *Arabia* appear less than 20 times. Neither the Sumerians nor the Hurrians are mentioned directly in undisputed biblical texts. However, scholarly discussions practically always devote much more time to discussing the Hittites, Hurrians, Sumerians, and Arabs than they do the Cushites, if they discuss the Cushites at all. For example, in D. J. Wiseman's classic work *Peoples of Old Testament Times* (1973) there are thirteen chapters, each dealing with one of the various peoples of the Old Testament (Hebrews, Canaanites, Philistines, etc.). There is a substantial chapter on the Hittites and the Hurrians, but nothing on the Cushites. There is a chapter entitled 'The Arabs and the Ethiopians', but the discussion on 'Ethiopia' is limited to merely one

³ Many European and American scholars of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were blatantly racist. This is particularly true concerning early European Egyptologists, who attempted to appropriate Egyptian culture as 'Western' and to distance the Egyptian cultural advances as far as possible from any African connections. Scholars today in general are much more ethnically sensitive and 'politically correct', but much of the early bias has crept into general, accepted approaches of Old Testament scholarship, and scholars today, somewhat subconsciously, continue to think ethnocentrically, carrying out their scholarship from a clear Anglo-European perspective. Black American scholars such as Felder have tried to point this out, but with only mixed success. See the introductions to his works *Troubling Biblical Waters* (1989) and *Stony the Road We Trod* (1991). Scholars writing from other ethnic viewpoints are likewise joining this chorus in calling on White, male scholars, who dominate biblical scholarship, to reconsider how much their Anglo-American viewpoint might affect their approach to Scripture. See, for example, Carroll R. (1992).

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brief apologetic page at the end of the article, and only one sentence mentions the biblical land of ‘Cush’. *Peoples of the Old Testament World* (Hoerth, Mattingly, and Yamauchi, 1994), a newer work that updates Wiseman’s book, has thirteen similar chapters. This work drops the chapter on ‘Arabs and Ethiopians’ altogether and adds one on the Sumerians. Furthermore, the map of the Ancient Near East presented at the beginning of the book extends only to Lower Egypt and does not even show Cush! Both of these books address the people of the Old Testament world, but neither addresses the Black African Cushites, even though the Cushites play a significant role in the Old Testament, and a greater role than some of the other groups discussed. The prestigious *Anchor Bible Dictionary* follows a similar orientation. Two and a half pages are devoted to ‘Kush’⁴ while fourteen pages are devoted to the Hittites.⁵ The Hurrians, who are not even mentioned in the Bible, receive three pages: more than the Cushites, who are mentioned 54 times.

Therefore the perception conveyed to the Church, both through the popular media and through serious scholarly work, is that there was a significant Caucasian involvement in the biblical story but no Black African involvement. This perception is erroneous, and it has fostered disastrous theology within today’s White Church that has contributed to the continued, almost total, division of the North American Church into Black and White.

In order to tackle biblical texts that relate to ethnic issues it is critical that scholars, pastors, and parishioners open their eyes to the fact

⁴ Underlining the minimal importance assigned to the Cushites is the somewhat haphazard manner in which *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* addresses them. The country and history are discussed in the article mentioned above under ‘Kush’. The *people* with the proper name ‘Cush’, spelled the same in Hebrew as the nation, are inexplicably discussed under ‘Cush’ rather than ‘Kush’, as if they were unconnected. No explanation for the shift in transliteration is provided. Equally puzzling is the article on ‘Ethiopia’, a one-and-a-half-page discussion of biblical ‘Cush’ which covers exactly the same material as the article on ‘Kush’ but adds a paragraph on the relevance of modern Ethiopia (a completely different place). This article does not cite any bibliographic sources on ‘Cush’ but cites only references relating to post-biblical Axum and modern Ethiopia (i.e. Ullendorff’s works on Ethiopia and a book on the Ethiopian folk legend *Kebrä Negast*).

⁵ This discrepancy cannot be explained by a lack of material regarding the Cushites. Cush appears hundreds of times in the Egyptian literature. Besides the numerous references in the Hebrew Bible, Cush/Ethiopia also appears in Assyrian and Greek literature. Several significant books have been written on the history and culture of the Cushites (although the histories often use the term Nubia rather than Cush – see the discussion on terminology below). See, for example, Trigger (1965 and 1976); Shinnie (1967); Adams (1970); O’Connor (1993); and Török (1997).

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that the people of the biblical world did not look like the people of rural Minnesota. This chapter attempts to present a broad picture of the major racial or ethnic groups that play significant roles in the biblical world. A better understanding of this particular aspect of the historical context will help us as we attempt to formulate a theology relating to race.

Ethnicity

Defining and determining 'ethnicity' is complex and controversial, even among contemporary groups where mounds of sociological data exist and live interviews are possible. This problem is illustrated by an argument I overheard years ago between two of my international friends in college. A Palestinian student had remarked to a Somali student that they were Arab brothers. The Somali man objected, stating: 'We Somalis are not Arabs.' 'Yes you are,' the Palestinian argued. 'You are part of the Arab League. You must be Arabs.' 'You cannot tell me what I am,' the Somali countered. 'I know what I am and I am not an Arab.' The Palestinian was not convinced; he concluded, 'Like it or not, you are an Arab and my brother.' Thus, even determining exactly what constitutes the boundaries of the term 'Arab' in today's world can be challenging.

Developing precise definitions and distinctions of ethnic groups in the Ancient Near East or even within the Hellenistic world can be an even more difficult task, one that falls more properly within the realm of cultural anthropology or sociology than that of biblical theology. In recent years numerous helpful works have appeared that apply the methods and experience of anthropology and sociology to the study of the biblical world.⁶ These studies have emphasized the complexity of the issue. Because ethnic identity is 'socially constructed and subjectively perceived' it is impossible to find an objective set of criteria that defines the ethnic group in every situation (J. M. Hall 1997: 19). Traditionally, ethnic identity has been understood as connected to either genetics (physical appearance), language, and/or religion.⁷ However, since 'ethnicity involves the creation and maintenance of social boundaries,' other factors such as geographical location,

⁶ For example, see Clements (1989); Chalcraft (1997); Carter and Meyers (1996); McNutt (1999); and Carroll R. (ed.) (2000).

⁷ This definition goes back at least as far as Herodotus, *History* 8:144. See the discussion and critique of this definition by Lemche (1998: 8–21).

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ancestry (real or mythic), dress, diet, or numerous combinations can also play critical roles (McNutt 1999: 33).⁸

This book makes no pretence of undertaking a thorough anthropological study of ethnicity in the Ancient Near East, a subject well beyond the scope of this project. My intention is to describe very broadly the main ethnic groups that appear in the Scriptures, so that we might better understand the context from which biblical ethnic references are made. Undeniably these descriptions are overly simplistic and narrow, but they serve only as an introduction into the study. As mentioned above, entire books are devoted to describing the specific peoples of the Ancient Near East, and those descriptions do not need repeating here. Also, I am concerned here with only the largest ethnic groupings. In addition, since the focus of this book is on racial issues, I have attempted to discuss the ethnic groups along broad racial lines: that is, focusing on the issue of physical appearance, hazardous as this may be. However, territory, religion, language, and common descent are also important criteria.⁹ My goal is to create a proper sociological background context from which to interpret biblical texts and to develop biblical theology regarding race.

One of the few places in the records of the Ancient Near East where distinctions in ethnicity seem to be clearly presented is in ancient Egyptian literature and art. These distinctions appear to be fairly consistent throughout most of the Old Testament time period. Although these distinctions can be seen in much of Egyptian art, perhaps the clearest representation is a scene of humanity painted on the tomb of Seti I (1291–1279 BC). In this scene four main groups are depicted: Egyptians; the Cushites to the south; the Libyans to the west; and the Asiatics to the northeast. Numerous glazed tile ‘portraits’ from the palace of Rameses III (1180 BC) present a similar breakdown, but include the Hittites as a fifth group. Most of Egyptian art portrays these groups fairly consistently. Almost certainly this representation

⁸ J. Hall (1997: 19–26) provides a good discussion illustrating how physical appearance, language, or religion may serve as the determining factor in the ethnic identity of one particular group, but not play a significant role at all in the identity of other groups. He suggests that the basic common denominator of ethnic identity, that which shows up most frequently, is that of territory and common myth of descent.

⁹ For example, a major distinguishing factor between Cushites and Israelites was physical (skin colour, facial features, hair), but the strong, equally clear differences in territory, religion, language, and dress were no doubt also important. However, it is probable that the differences between an Israelite and an Ammonite or a Canaanite were probably not nearly so clear in any of the categories.

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is stereotyped, but the breakdown into these basic groups does seem to be a reflection of how the ancient Egyptians, at least, perceived 'ethnic' groupings.¹⁰

This division also parallels a similar distinction of language grouping in the region: Semitic, Egyptian, Indo-European, and Meroitic. The Semitic and Egyptian languages comprise two of the six major branches of a larger family of languages called Afro-Asiatic.¹¹ The Indo-European family of languages consists of several branches, including Anatolian, to which the Hittite language belongs, and Hellenic, to which the Greek and probably also the Philistine language belong.¹² Although many of the Cushites no doubt spoke Egyptian, they also had their own particular language, the descendant of which is called Meroitic. However, at the present time this language has not been completely deciphered.¹³

For lack of better broad-based categories, I will discuss the ethnic world of the Old Testament within these same four categories: Asiatics or Semites (including the Israelites), Cushites, Egyptians, and Indo-Europeans (Hittites, Philistines). Because the fifth group (Libyans) plays a minor role in the Old Testament, it is not discussed.

The 'Asiatics': Israel and her 'Semitic' cousins

The actual origin of the Israelites continues to be a debated topic. One of the central problems in the study of Israelite origins, as mentioned above, is the difficulty in defining such terms as 'nation', 'race', 'ethnic group', or 'country'. Most Western readers of the Bible will tend to project modern concepts of the nation and state into the Old Testament. However, the ethnic or national consciousness of people in Palestine during the formative period of Israel is far from clear. What distinguished Canaanites from Amorites or from Israelites? If a descendant of Abraham living in Canaan picked up the Canaanite

¹⁰ See the discussion by Leahy (2000: 226–227).

¹¹ The Afro-Asiatic languages include Semitic, Egyptian, Berber (North Africa in regions west of Egypt), Cushitic (a group of about 40 languages in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, unrelated to the country of Cush), Omotic (Western Ethiopia), and Chadic (West Africa). See Huehnergard (1992: 155) and Hodge (2001: 15–27).

¹² Examples of Philistine language and writing are rare, but the few seals that are extant appear to be related to the Cypro-Minoan language used in the Aegean during the Late Bronze Age. This language is likewise part of the Hellenic language family. See Dothan (1992: 332).

¹³ As yet, Meroitic is unclassified as a language (Huehnergard 1992: 166). See the overview of issues and the discussion of progress on the language in Török (1997: 62–67).

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dialect, married a Canaanite woman and worshipped Baal (as many Israelites apparently did), was he an Israelite or a Canaanite? What about his children and grandchildren? The 'ethnic' situation in Canaan throughout the second millennium (2000–1000 BC) was extremely complex.¹⁴ However, it is probably safe to conclude that the Israelites of the Old Testament had numerous 'ethnic' affinities with their neighbours in and around Palestine and that the lines of ethnic demarcation were not hard and fast.¹⁵

Another important factor in the discussion of Israel's origins is the view one holds regarding the date and composition of the Pentateuch.¹⁶ I will draw heavily from the biblical tradition in the discussion of Israel's origins, but I suggest that my conclusions regarding the ethnic relationship between Israel and her Semitic-speaking neighbours will not differ substantially from that developed by those who are sceptical of the biblical sources and who lean primarily on non-biblical material.¹⁷

One important aspect of ethnic identity is language. Hebrew, the language of the Israelites, is a Semitic language. The Semitic language family is split into two main groups. East Semitic is represented by Akkadian, the language of the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The West Semitic branch includes Northwest Semitic, Arabic, and South Semitic (Ethiopic, Amharic, Tigrinya). Hebrew falls within the Northwest Semitic group. Also included in this group are the languages of almost all of Israel's neighbours: Canaanite, Moabite,

¹⁴ Even the biblical tradition regarding the people in the region is complicated. For example, 1 Samuel 14:21 employs the term 'Hebrews' in reference to a separate group from the 'Israelites' (lit. 'sons of Israel'). In addition numerous different biblical lists of the groups inhabiting the Promised Land appear. Sometimes the list has five entities (Exod. 13:5), sometimes six (Exod. 34:11), and sometimes seven (Josh. 3:10). Non-biblical sources only add to the confusion: for example, what was the ethnicity of the Habiru in Canaan mentioned in the Amarna Letters (mid-fourteenth century BC)? See Greenberg (1961) and Na'aman (1986: 271–288).

¹⁵ See the helpful monograph by Lemche (1991). Some of Lemche's approach has been seriously challenged, but his point regarding the very thin ethnic line between Israelites and Canaanites is convincing.

¹⁶ See the discussion by Rogerson (1989: 31).

¹⁷ For a discussion of Israel's origins based primarily on archaeology, while showing scepticism toward the biblical account, see Ahlström (1986). Ahlström argues that the term 'Israel' first referred to a territory, regardless of ethnicity. During the monarchical period the name became a political term designating the state in the central hill country north of Jerusalem, and then finally, in the post-exilic period, the term became an ideological term referring to the party of returned exiles who followed Ezra's law. Thus, concludes Ahlström, the term Israel became the ideological term for Judaism. Likewise arguing for a distinction between the biblical picture and the historical picture of Israel is P. Davies (1992).

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Edomite, Ammonite, Ugaritic, Phoenician, Aramaic,¹⁸ and Amorite.¹⁹ The Philistines, however, are not in this group, and neither are the Egyptians. Those within the Northwest Semitic group would have had a close linguistic affinity: that is, linguistically speaking, those who spoke Northwest Semitic dialects were cousins. Furthermore, Hebrew, Moabite, Edomite, Ammonite, and Phoenician all probably developed from Canaanite. Thus these groups had an even stronger linguistic affinity.

Examining the biblical tradition for the origin of the Israelites leads to a conclusion that fits well with the linguistic data. Israel is not mentioned in Genesis 10 as one of the ancient peoples of the world. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, it is important to note that Adam, Eve, Noah, and even Abraham cannot be called 'Israelites', and it is highly unlikely that their language would be recognizable as Hebrew. Initially, Abraham is apparently a resident of Mesopotamia, and his family appears to have originated in western Mesopotamia. Based on the names of the family and a northern location of 'Ur of the Chaldees', many scholars have concluded that Abraham is actually an Amorite, part of the many waves of Amorites that migrated into Mesopotamia before and during the patriarchal period (Wenham 1987: 272–273).²⁰ However, in Genesis 24:4 and 28:5 Abraham is associated with the Arameans. The use of Aramean in connection with Abraham probably refers to those 'scattered tribes of people in upper Mesopotamia who had not yet coalesced into the nation of Aram that appears in later texts' (Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas 2000: 60, 200).²¹ The creed-like statement of Deuteronomy 26:5, 'My father was a wandering Aramean,' certainly remembers an Aramean ancestry. The text probably refers to Jacob and not Abraham (von Rad 1966: 158; Cragie 1976: 321), but the distinction is mute for our purposes. Jacob's mother and his two wives are identified as Arameans in Genesis 28:5. No doubt the patriarchs spoke one of the

¹⁸ See Huehnergard (1992: 155–161); and Waltke and O'Connor (1990: 1.2).

¹⁹ Amorite as a written language has only survived through names. However, thousands of Amorite names and probable loan words appear in Mesopotamian (East Semitic) documents. The form of the names provides strong evidence that the language of the Amorites is a branch of the Northwest Semitic family. See Mendenhall (1992: 199), and Gelb (1980).

²⁰ Ezekiel 16:3 states, 'your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.' However, as Block (1997: 474–475) notes, this text refers to Jerusalem and not Abraham, and is also highly figurative/symbolic.

²¹ Hamilton (1990: 364) concurs and notes that the Chaldeans were ethnically related to the Arameans.

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Northwest Semitic dialects and looked very similar to numerous other groups originating from western Mesopotamia.

According to Genesis, in response to God's command, Abraham moves his family to Canaan, where the family resides for the rest of his life and the next two generations. Although both Isaac and Jacob return to Mesopotamia to marry Aramean women (Gen. 28:5), Jacob's sons apparently do not follow this tradition. Judah marries a Canaanite woman (Gen. 38:2) and then also fathers twins, Perez and Zerah, by his daughter-in-law Tamar, who is probably also a Canaanite.²² Genesis 46:10 indicates that Simeon likewise had a Canaanite wife. Joseph, after becoming the adviser of Pharaoh, married an Egyptian woman named Asenath (Gen. 41:50) who bore him two sons: Manasseh and Ephraim. Thus the biblical tradition presents the ancestors of the tribes of Israel as a mix of western Mesopotamian (Aramean and/or Amorite), Canaanite, and Egyptian.

Indeed, throughout much of the Old Testament period the Israelites were probably very similar to their neighbours in appearance. In the post-exilic period, when Judaism as a cultural way of life began to emerge, the Jews began to define their ethnic boundaries very precisely, and Judaism became quite distinctive. But for much of their history the ethnic boundary between Israel and her neighbours was fuzzy and fluid.

What did the ancient Israelites actually look like? Most probably they looked very similar to other Semitic-speaking people of the area in and around Canaan. The best estimation of the actual appearance of the ancient Israelites would perhaps combine the look of the current inhabitants of the Middle East with the representations of the Israelites and other 'Asiatic' peoples in the paintings and monument carvings of the Egyptians and the Assyrians. As mentioned above, numerous 'Asiatics' are depicted in Egyptian art from the Old Testament period. Likewise, numerous Israelites are portrayed in Assyrian sculpture. Jehu, king of Israel, along with several other Israelites, is depicted in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (about 825 BC). Numerous scenes portraying Israelites are included in the sculptured wall-panels from Sennacherib's palace (701 BC) portraying the siege of the Israelite city of Lachish.²³ The people in these

²² Tamar's Canaanite origin is suggested by Westermann (1986: 51); Fretheim (1994: 605); and Wenham (1994: 366).

²³ See the excellent pictures and discussion in Reade (1983: 44–52).

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artistic portrayals are, in general, similar in appearance to the Israelis and Arabs living in and around Israel/Palestine today. Of course, ethnic groups always reflect variety in appearance, and this description is certainly an over-generalization; yet it is important to attempt a description of an average Old Testament Israelite. For Anglo-European Christian readers, it is critical to come to grips with the fact that these people were not blue-eyed, blond-haired Caucasians; they did not look like White Americans or White Britons. They looked more like modern Arabs.

The Cushites

One of the confusing aspects of studying the Cushites is that several different terms are used by scholars to refer to the same continuous civilization that stretched along the banks of the Nile, south of Egypt, upstream of the Nile's cataracts, in what is now the modern country of Sudan. This area is referred to by various scholars as Nubia, Wawat, Cush, Meroe, and Ethiopia. All of these terms are correct in some sense and in certain stages of history.²⁴ Apparently the Egyptians originally referred to this area as *Ta-sety*, 'Land of the Bow', a reference either to the great bend in the Nile that defined the area or to the Cushite fame with the weapon (Taylor 1991: 5).²⁵ Within this domain there were two regions, or perhaps two tribes or groups. The northernmost area (between the first and fourth cataracts of the Nile) was called Wawat and the southernmost area (above the fourth cataract) was called Cush (R. J. Williams 1973: 79). During the Eighteenth Dynasty in Egypt (1570–1305 BC) these terms represented two distinct provinces (W. C. Hayes 1973: 349), but soon afterwards the terms became interchangeable. The southern area became more powerful and dominant, and thus the name Cush became the common word used in Egyptian texts for the entire region (Quirke and Spencer 1992: 210).²⁶

By the fourth century BC the Cushites had moved their capital

²⁴ For recent discussions of the history of Cush, see Török (1997); Welsby (1998); Yurco (2001); Burstein (1997); and O'Connor (1993).

²⁵ Numerous Egyptologists, however, translate *Ta-sety* as 'Nubia' in English translations. Breasted (1906) used this term, and much of the scholarly work on this subject has followed his terminology. See also James (1973: 296). Taylor (1991: 5) points out, however, that the term *Nubia* does not occur in the ancient documents until the Roman period. O'Connor (1993: xii) likewise identifies *Nubia* as a late term, but he states the term first appears in the third century BC.

²⁶ See also the good discussion on terminology by Török (1997: 1–5).

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upstream to a city called Meroe. Some recent writers, therefore, refer to the Cush of this period as the Meroitic Empire, or sometimes they simply call the region Meroe.

The greatest confusion was introduced by the Greeks, who indiscriminately called all Black people south of Egypt by the term *Ethiopian* ('the burnt faces').²⁷ Most of the Greeks' encounters with Black people were with the Cushites, from their connection with Egypt; so most of the Greek literature that mentions Ethiopians is referring to those people along the Nile, above the fourth cataract, whom this book refers to as Cushites. This is a different region and a different people from those of modern Ethiopia, which lies to the east and to the south of the Cushites.²⁸

In the Akkadian literature the term 'Kus' is used to refer to this same civilization along the Nile, south of Egypt. The Hebrew Bible follows the Egyptian and Akkadian terminology, likewise using the term 'Cush'. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, rendered the term as 'Ethiopia', in keeping with the Greek geographical understanding of the day.

Scholars continue to use different terms for this same region and civilization. Classical Greek scholars and New Testament scholars tend to follow the Greek rendering and use the term 'Ethiopia'. Most Egyptologists and some historians still use the Roman-era term 'Nubia'. One of the major archaeologists of Cush, George Reisner, used the term 'Ethiopia' because of the classical Greek usage. His student Dows Dunham, however, who finished the publication of Reisner's excavation data, argued in 1946 that Egyptologists should use the more precise term 'Cush' (1946: 380).

The Hebrew Bible consistently uses the term *Cush* (*kūš*) both for the region and for the inhabitants of the region. English translations of the Bible, however, are incredibly inconsistent in their translation of the Hebrew term *Cush* or *Cushite*. The King James Version, for example, translates the term as 'Cush' about one-third of the time and as 'Ethiopia' the rest of the time. The New Revised Standard Version likewise translates 'Cush' in some passages and 'Ethiopia' in

²⁷ For an overview of the usage of the term *Aithiopia* in Greek and Roman literature see Burstein (1995: 29ff., 97ff).

²⁸ The area of modern Ethiopia in East Africa was the homeland of Axum, an ancient empire also inhabited by dark-skinned peoples. However, Axum did not emerge as an entity until well after the New Testament era had ended. Although the Axumites converted to Christianity during the fourth century AD and thus play an important role in Church history, they play no role in the Bible.

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others. When 'Ethiopia' is used, the marginal notes add 'or Nubia, Heb. Cush.' The New American Standard Translation, the New Living Bible, and the New English Bible are similar, sometimes translating as 'Cush' and sometimes translating as 'Ethiopia', without any apparent rhyme or reason for the change (other than probable individual translator preference). The New International Version usually translates the Hebrew word *kûš* as 'Cush', except in Jeremiah 13:23, where for some reason 'Ethiopia' is used, and in Daniel 11:43, where 'Nubia' is used. The New Jerusalem Bible is similar, normally translating as 'Cush' but using 'Ethiopia' in a handful of instances. The 1988 Jewish Publication Society's English translation of the Tanakh (the Hebrew Bible) uses all three terms – Ethiopia, Cush, and Nubia – without any apparent reason for the shift. The translation strategy for this important term in the English translations of the Bible makes no apparent sense. The use of the term 'Ethiopia' is misleading, because modern Ethiopia is a different place from ancient Cush. Likewise, the use of several different English terms to translate the one Hebrew term *kûš* tends to diffuse the significance that the Cushites play in the Scriptures. This phenomenon may also reflect an attitude of indifference on the part of the White translation editors toward the significance of this term.

Of course the terminology is not the critical issue. What is critical is to recognize that these different terms refer to the same continuous civilization: a civilization that stood as one of the major powers in the Ancient Near East for over 2,000 years; a civilization that appears again and again in the biblical text.

The Cushites are particularly important to this study because they were clearly Black African people with classic 'Negroid' features.²⁹ There are two lines of evidence for this conclusion. First, the Cushites are presented this way in the ancient art of the Egyptians, and, later in history, in that of the Greeks and Romans. Second, numerous ancient literary texts refer, directly and indirectly, to the black skin colour and other 'Negroid' features of the Cushites.

First, the argument from art: W. Hayes writes in the *Cambridge Ancient History* that the art of Egypt clearly identified the Nubian/Cushite group as 'Negro'. It was this connection, Hayes continues, that put the Mediterranean world into contact with the black peoples (1973: 352–353). Strouhal, in his work *Life of the Ancient Egyptians* (1992: 202), using the term 'Nubian' rather than 'Cushite', states that

²⁹ See the helpful discussion by Trigger (1978: 26–35).

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from very early in the historical record ‘we meet with captured enemies whose features, hair or beard, and clothing identify them as Nubian or black Africans infiltrating from the south . . .’ The Cushites were famous as archers, and Strouhal refers to several Egyptian paintings that show black troops (1992: 203, 207). The most spectacular artwork on this subject is a painting in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo depicting a battle between Pharaoh Tut-ankh-amon (1352–1344 BC) and the Cushites. The Cushite warriors are not merely dark-skinned or tanned; they are clearly black. This painting can be seen in the volume by Strouhal (1992: plate 213) mentioned above or in a double-page foldout in the German publication by Eggebrecht (1984: 190–191).

A quick perusal through most books on Egyptian art will reveal portrayals of people, usually Cushites, who have very black skin colour. Aldred’s *New Kingdom Art in Ancient Egypt During the Eighteenth Dynasty* identifies a black dancer as ‘Nubian’ (1951: plates 54 and 60). In James’s book *Ancient Egypt: The Land and its Legacy* (1988: plates 137 and 147) there is a scene of Cushites bringing to the Pharaoh products of tropical Africa: gold, ebony, leopard skins, giraffe tails, monkeys, and baboons. James also presents a good picture of a sculptured granite sphinx with the head of Taharqa, the Cushite king who ruled Egypt as Pharaoh during the Twenty-fifth Dynasty. Taharqa is not depicted in the same art style as Egyptian pharaohs, for his features are Negroid – thick lips, broad nose, and tight curly hair.³⁰

Snowden has researched extensively the depiction of Blacks in Greek and Roman art. In his two books he presents numerous pictures of paintings and sculptures that are clearly representations of Black people. Snowden (1983: 5, 10–11) comments that Blacks were apparently popular subjects for art in the Greek and Roman world, and he presents sixty-two photographs of Greek and Roman art depicting people of the Negroid race. Since most of the Greek and Roman contact with Blacks was with the Cushites via Egypt, it is probably safe to conclude that most of the Blacks depicted are Cushites or their descendants.³¹

³⁰ See also H. Hall’s discussion of ethnicity in Egypt and among the royal families of Cush (Ethiopia) and Egypt. He states that there is clear evidence of ‘Negroid’ features, frequently from intermarriages, at all levels of Egyptian society (1969: 160).

³¹ Snowden (1970: 113), although using the classical term ‘Ethiopians’ instead of ‘Cushites’, writes, ‘The Ethiopians inhabiting the regions south of Egypt, however, have a special relevance for this book and, hence, merit a fuller treatment. In the first

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The most extensive collection of artistic portrayals of the Cushites is the significant work *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, Volume I, entitled *From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire*. This volume contains hundreds of pictures of ancient Egyptian, Greek, and Roman art, which portray Black people with clear Negroid features. Most of the examples mentioned above in the various volumes on Egypt are also included in this volume (Bugner 1976).³²

The other line of evidence identifying the Cushites as Blacks or Negroes is that of ancient literature. Although the Egyptians depicted Cushites frequently in their art, literary references to skin colour or other ethnic features are rare. Snowden suggests that this is because the Egyptians were very familiar with the Cushites, having lived with them as neighbours, and having seen them regularly in Egypt. The Cushites, therefore, were not a curiosity to the Egyptians. When foreigners outside of Egypt encountered the Cushites, however, they were frequently struck by the obvious physical differences between the Cushites and themselves (Snowden 1983: 7). Skin colour was the most distinguishing difference, and Greco-Roman literature frequently mentions the black skin colour of the Cushites. Indeed, the dark colour of the Cushites (or Ethiopians, as the Greeks called them) became the yardstick by which antiquity measured people of colour. Thus when the Greeks described the colour of the inhabitants of India it was said that their skin was dark, but not as dark as the Cushites (Gk. 'Ethiopians') (Snowden 1983: 7;

place, it was the Ethiopians south of Egypt with whom Greeks and Romans had contacts extending over the longest period of time. Secondly, it is certain that Greco-Roman experience with these Ethiopians and the records thereof, providing more details than of any other Ethiopian peoples, molded to a great extent the classical image of Ethiopia and Ethiopians and influenced attitudes toward dark or black Africans, regardless of the part of Africa from which they came. Furthermore, it was to the kingdoms of Napata and Meroe (frequently mentioned by classical authors) that a large portion of Greco-Roman observations on Ethiopia referred.' For a similar, yet more complex, conclusion regarding the Roman perception of the Latin term *Aethiopes*, see L. Thompson (1989: 57-85).

³² Note especially the following articles: 'The Iconography of the Black in Ancient Egypt: From the Beginnings to the Twenty-fifth Dynasty', by Jean Vercoutter; 'Kushites and Meroites: Iconography of the African Rulers in Ancient Upper Egypt', by Jean Leclant; and 'Iconographic Evidence on the Black Populations in Greco-Roman Antiquity', by Frank M. Snowden. Although this is an outstanding work with fine articles, one wonders how Egyptian art can be included under the rubric of 'Western Art'. Perhaps during the Hellenistic period Egyptian art and culture became sufficiently interconnected with that of the Greco-Roman world to be classified as 'Western,' but prior to that, especially during the second millennium BC, Egyptian art and culture was hardly 'Western'.

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1970: 2–3).³³ The colour of the Cushites' skin even became proverbial: in Jerusalem Jeremiah wrote, 'Can the Cushite change his skin?' (Jer. 13:23). The Greeks and Romans used a similar proverb: 'to wash an Ethiopian white' became a common expression used to convey the futility of trying to change nature (Snowden 1983: 7).³⁴

Other physical features are discussed in the ancient sources as well: the Cushites were described as having not only black skin, but also flat noses, thick lips, and woolly hair (Snowden 1983: 10).

The descriptions given by the ancient authors combine with the portrayals painted by the ancient Egyptian artists to present a very convincing case that the Cushites were, as Snowden (1983: 5) defines them, of the 'pure' or 'pronounced' Negroid type. Even today, the northern Sudan is populated with people having some of the darkest skin colour in all of Africa.

The Egyptians

The ethnicity of the ancient Egyptians has been a source of considerable controversy in recent years. Early European archaeologists and anthropologists tried to connect Egypt culturally and ethnically with the forerunners of Western civilization. They tended to deny any input into the advancements of Egyptian civilization from Black Africa (which they viewed as too primitive and backward to have been the force behind the development of Egypt).³⁵ Indeed, the

³³ Snowden cites numerous ancient Greek and Roman sources.

³⁴ Snowden cites six primary sources and argues that the proverbs carried no negative connotations. Thompson (1989: 45–48), however, deals with numerous Roman sources and maintains that Snowden has oversimplified the data. Thompson suggests that several of the sources imply a mocking attitude toward the black-skinned 'Ethiopians'. However, Thompson is quick to point out that the Romans also mocked others who differed from them, including the Germanic tribes who had 'blond and grease-knotted hair'.

³⁵ Budge (1902: vii), for example, acknowledges an African element in the early origins of 'primitive' Egypt. However, he then assumes that some type of advanced outside civilization must have invaded in order to produce the early dynasties of Egypt. He writes, 'The facts related in it [the following chapter] illustrate the manner in which the civilization of the dynastic Egyptians developed out of the primitive culture of the indigenous predynastic peoples of Egypt, after it had been modified and improved by the superior intelligence of a race of men, presumably of Asiatic origin, who invaded and conquered Egypt.' Note that while Budge's works are dated, they remain in print and they are on the shelves of most large bookstores today. H. Hall (1969: 160), in the prestigious *Cambridge Ancient History*, in discussing intermarriage that occurred later in Egyptian history after the development of this 'superior race', writes, 'This cannot have been any but a degenerate component in the new Egyptian race, to which the Ethiopian and the Negro elements contributed nothing good except a certain amount

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prevailing theory throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century and up to the middle of the twentieth was that *all* significant cultural achievement in *all* African empires was brought about by a small group of White elite rulers. These writers argued that the Africans were utterly unable to achieve anything significant in the area of culture or government. Obviously, many of these early archaeologists reflect a blatantly racist interpretation of the data.³⁶ In recent years some writers have fallen into the error of the other extreme, arguing that *everything* in Egyptian culture was the product of Black African input or that the Egyptian people and culture were synonymous with Black African culture.³⁷ Both of these extreme positions have tended to distort and manipulate the data in order to claim the Egyptian civilization as either 'White' or 'Black'.

However, a fairly strong consensus is emerging among scholars today that the early Egyptians were probably a mixture of both Black African elements and Asiatic elements. Although the early origins cannot be known with certainty, von Soden has suggested that the study of language and comparative linguistics offers the best means for drawing conclusions about prehistoric migrations. The presence of both Semitic and Hamitic (African) elements in the ancient Egyptian language, according to von Soden (1994: 14), suggests a mixing of the two peoples in Egypt at a very early date. The archaeological evidence appears to point to the same conclusion, suggesting tentatively that during the thousand years or so before the rise of dynastic Egypt (i.e. prior to 3100 BC) the ancient inhabitants of the Nile Valley were joined in the north by desert tribes from the east and the west, while those in the south were joined by groups migrating up from what would later become Cush.³⁸ Although the details are uncertain, it does appear that the Egyptians emerged out of an indigenous group that contained both African and Asiatic elements, and benefited from the unique environmental situation of the Nile Valley (J. A. Wilson 1951: 16–17).

of energy.' Hall continues by describing the results of this intermarriage as a 'particularly villainous cast of countenance', and as a 'contamination'. Although Hall wrote this back in 1927 it continues to be reprinted as part of the *Cambridge Ancient History*.

³⁶ See the discussion of this theory and its impact on Western thinking in Howe (1998: 115–121).

³⁷ See the thorough discussion and critique in Howe (1998: 122–137).

³⁸ This synthesis, however, is an oversimplification. For a detailed discussion see Hoffman (1979); Wilson (1951); Hassan (2000: 665–678); and B. Williams (1992: 331–342).

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Although the actual origin of the Egyptians is uncertain, without doubt there was a constant influx of different ethnic groups into Egypt throughout the pharaonic period, and thus throughout most of the Old Testament period. Especially from around 2000 BC onward, Egypt reflected a wide range of ethnic diversity (Leahy 2000: 225–234; Bresciani 1997: 221–253). Foreign conquest by Egyptian armies brought to Egypt a steady stream of foreign slaves. In addition, a large portion of Egypt's army was composed of foreign elements: especially Cushites, but including Libyans and Asiatics, and later, Greeks and even Jews. Upon completing their military service, these troops often came to Egypt without wives, and they married native Egyptian women and settled down, becoming part of the Egyptian social fabric (Leahy 2000: 228, 232; Bresciani 1997: 224–225, 230–231). However, numerous other non-military foreigners, especially Cushites, became 'Egyptians' and advanced in Egyptian society (Bresciani 1997: 231).

Furthermore, when the Egyptians conquered a territory, they often brought many of the children from the royal families back to Egypt and educated them alongside the children of Egyptian nobility in a school referred to as the *Kap*. This was a prestigious school, and graduates carried the name of the school as part of their title. The foreigners who graduated from this institution often then advanced into the 'civil service' within the palace, the administration of the empire, or the army. Bresciani (1997: 231–232) notes: 'The existence of the *Kap* reveals both a basic absence in ancient Egypt of racial prejudice and a policy of cultural assimilation of the "defeated" by the victors.' Numerous Cushites entered the *Kap* and served throughout Egypt in a wide range of administrative positions.³⁹ In addition, Cushites often show up in Egyptian records as court magicians (Bresciani 1997: 232). Finally, foreigners also entered Egypt as conquerors and rulers. Egypt was ruled at one time or another in its history by pharaohs and ruling classes who were Hyksos (Semites), Libyans, and Cushites (Leahy 2000: 230–231).

There is also evidence throughout much of Egyptian history of intermarriage between the local residents and the incoming groups. Thus it is difficult to define with any precision the 'race' or 'ethnicity' of the ancient Egyptians. Obviously they were not Caucasians; the art of the Egyptians portrays them as having light brown skin. Furthermore, the art shows that the Egyptians distinguished themselves graphically from both their Asiatic neighbours to the north and

³⁹ See also the discussion of the *Kap* in Bryan (1991: 261); and Leahy (2000: 229).

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their Black African neighbours to the south. However, these portrayals are probably somewhat generalized and they may reflect the thinking of the ruling class only. Without doubt there was wide diversity in the physical appearance of the ancient Egyptians. Trigger (1978: 27) suggests that ancient Egypt and Cush probably reflected a similar physical appearance to that found today in the Nile Valley. There is a continuum, Trigger writes, from north to south. He explains:

On an average, between the Delta in northern Egypt and the Sudd of the Upper Nile, skin color tends to darken from light brown to what appears to the eye as bluish black, hair changes from wavy-straight to curly or kinky, noses become flatter and broader, lips become thicker and more everted, teeth enlarge in size from small to medium, height and linearity of body build increase to culminate in the extremely tall and thin 'Nilotic' populations of the south, and bodies become less hirsute. All of these people are Africans.

The situation in Ancient Egypt was probably similar. In the Delta, the northern part of Egypt, the majority of Egyptians probably appeared as they are portrayed in Egyptian art: with straight black hair and light brown skin. Undoubtedly, however, there were other people in the society, both Asiatics and Cushites, who looked different but were, nonetheless, Egyptians.

Thus the term 'Egyptian' probably did not define a strict physical appearance. Indeed, Leahy states that from the second millennium BC onward Egypt reflected a wide diversity in physical appearance, and thus Egyptians defined themselves not by physical appearance but by 'residence in the Nile Valley, by language, by religion, and by general culture' (Leahy 2000: 232).

The Indo-Europeans (Philistines, Hittites)

The ethnic world of the Old Testament also included two major non-Semitic-speaking peoples, the Philistines and the Hittites. While the Israelites would have shared numerous cultural aspects with the Canaanites and other Semites of the region, it is probable that they had very little cultural affinity with either of these two groups. That is, stark cultural contrasts in language, religion, dress, and myths of origins would have existed between these 'Indo-European' groups and the Semitic Israelites.

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Like the Israelites, the Philistines are a group who migrated into Palestine. Indeed the English name 'Palestine' comes from the term 'Philistine', via the Greek transliteration of Herodotus and then the Latin usage by the Romans. The origin of the Philistines is not known with certainty, but most scholars place their origin in the Aegean Sea region – the coastal areas and islands between eastern Greece and western Anatolia (modern Turkey). Toward the end of the thirteenth century BC the Mycenaean civilization in this region underwent serious turmoil, and this upheaval apparently produced numerous migrations into the Eastern Mediterranean (Dothan 2000: 1267). This group spread down the eastern coastline of the Mediterranean Sea along the coastal plain of Palestine and even threatened to penetrate into Egypt. The Egyptian pharaoh Rameses III (1184–1153 BC) defeated them in a series of land and sea battles. The Egyptian annals of this conflict refer to these people generically as 'the Sea Peoples'. One of the groups within the Sea Peoples was called *Peleset*, which most scholars identify with the biblical Hebrew term 'Philistine' (Dothan 2000: 1267–1269). Kitchen (1973a: 53–60) notes that in Egyptian literature the Philistines are never mentioned alone; he concludes that the term 'Philistine' probably includes several groups involved in this aggressive migration. The Bible tends to associate the Philistines with the island of Crete (Deut. 2:23; Amos 9:7; Jer. 47:4), which implies that Crete was either the home of some of the Philistine groups or else a 'stepping-stone' in their migratory path to the Eastern Mediterranean (Dothan 2000: 1269; Kitchen 1973a: 56).⁴⁰ The Philistines settled along the coastal plain of Israel and at several points in history challenged Israel for domination of Palestine. After the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, however, the Philistines faded from history. Through war, assimilation, deportation, and incursion of foreign settlers the Philistine cities in Palestine lost all ethnic or national distinction (Dothan 2000: 1271).

One of the major differences between the Philistines and the Israelites that the biblical texts mention repeatedly is that the Philistines were uncircumcised (Judg. 14:3, 15:18; 1 Sam. 14:6, 17:26, 36; 31:4; 2 Sam. 1:20). This was a significant difference because most of the Northwest Semitic groups (Israel's Semitic cousins) practised

⁴⁰ Howard (1994: 237–238) suggests that the origin of the Philistines may be much more complex, even including Canaanite elements. He notes the difficult text in Genesis 10:14 that connects the Philistines with the Egyptians, and suggests that this may be a reference to a totally separate group.

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circumcision, as did some classes of Egyptians (priests, for example). The Philistines were one of the few groups in the region that did not practise this rite (R. Hall 1992: 1025–1026; V. Matthews 1991: 84–85).

Another major Indo-European group that appears in the Old Testament is the Hittites.⁴¹ The origin of the Hittites is not known, but they apparently migrated into Anatolia (modern Turkey) around 2000 BC and assimilated the Hatti people who inhabited the area at the time. By 1700 BC they had established a powerful state; they continued as a major player in the geopolitical scene of the Ancient Near East until 1190 BC, when the Hittite empire collapsed, probably because of pressure from northern tribes and also the migrating Sea Peoples (Hoffner 1973: 198–199; 1994: 128–130; Macqueen 2000: 1085–1105). However, during the end of the thirteenth century BC and the beginning of the twelfth century BC the Hittites migrated down into Syria, probably continuing as far as Canaan (Hoffner 1994: 153). They established firm control of Syria, where they continued to dwell and rule even after the collapse of their civilization in Anatolia (Macqueen 2000: 1099). In Syria they came into direct conflict with the expanding Egyptian influence of the Nineteenth Dynasty (1305–1200 BC), and numerous battles were fought between the two (Macqueen 2000: 1094; Hoffner 1994: 130). Hittite prisoners appear in Egyptian monumental art from this period. Bresciani notes that they are depicted with ‘beardless faces, double chins, and long ringleted hair’ (Bresciani 1997: 238). Because of their presence in Syria and their probable migrations into Canaan, Israel also comes into frequent contact with them, especially during the early years of the monarchy.⁴²

Thus, if today’s readers of the Bible want to find people of ‘Caucasian’ appearance in the Old Testament, the Indo-European Philistines and Hittites are probably the closest. However, even the individuals from these ancient Indo-European groups probably resembled the people of modern Greece or Turkey more than they may have resembled the people of modern England or mid-western America.

⁴¹ For an excellent discussion of Hittite history see Bryce (1998).

⁴² However, numerous references are also made to the Hittites in the biblical books that cover the early years of Israel’s history (Genesis–Joshua). Hoffner (1973: 214) doubts whether this term, especially during the patriarchal period, refers to the same Hittites that dominated Anatolia. Hamilton (1995: 126–129), on the other hand, in addressing the presence of Hittites in Genesis 23, presents numerous arguments in favour of identifying the references to ‘Hittite’ in Genesis with the Hittites of Anatolia.

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Conclusions

The people in the Old Testament reflected a wide range of ethnic diversity. However, contrary to popular perceptions, few of these characters, if any, looked like modern northern Europeans or mid-western Americans. Although the concept of ‘ethnicity’ is difficult to delineate precisely, it is possible to determine distinctions between four major ethnic groups that appear in the Old Testament. The group appearing most frequently, of course, is the Northwest Semitic group, composed of Israel and many of her neighbours (Canaanites, Moabites, Edomites, Ammonites, etc.). Also playing a role in the Old Testament are the Cushites (Black Africans), the Egyptians (probably a mix of Asiatic and Black African), and the Indo-Europeans (Philistines and Hittites). Thus the Old Testament world was completely multi-ethnic.

It is important that today’s readers of the Old Testament, particularly readers within the White Church, realize this multi-ethnic background. White North American Christianity has a strong historical tendency to be ethnocentric, and part of this distortion is to project Caucasian people back into all aspects of the biblical story. Coming to grips with the multi-ethnic, non-Caucasian cultural context of the Old Testament is a critical foundational step in developing a truly biblical theology of race.