



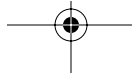
## INTRODUCTION

*Then Israel came to Egypt;  
Jacob lived as an alien in the land of Ham.*

PSALM 105:23

In Acts 10:9-16, the apostle Peter had a vision in which he was invited to partake of clean and unclean meat. Of course, as a law-observant Jew, Peter would never even think about eating from that spread. Even the clean meat that was on the sheet was considered taboo, simply because it was in the same geographical space as the unclean. The exact meaning of the vision was revealed to him when representatives from the Roman centurion Cornelius summoned him to come and minister to their master. After discovering that Cornelius had also been miraculously contacted by the same God, the meaning of the vision became clear to Peter, who declared, “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:34-35).

The basic teaching of an inclusive God abounds in Scripture, yet some have used God’s Word to perpetuate the myth of a cursed race—the dark-skinned sons of Ham. The myth has become so common that many have placed the text about the “curse of Ham” in their own imaginative Bibles next to verses like “cleanliness is next to godliness” or “God helps those who help themselves.” Armed with a cadre of textual misinterpretations, allegations of a cursed race have been used to subjugate the peoples of Africa and other dark-skinned people for over a millennia. This book is written to join the growing battery of research that aims to set the record straight.

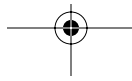




Working under the assumption that the author of the “Table of Nations” in Genesis 10 intended for it to convey an accurate geographical picture of Ham’s descendants, this book defines “biblical Africa” as a territory that transcends our modern understanding of the continent and includes large portions of the Middle East. You will notice throughout the book that the term “biblical Africa” is often used interchangeably with the phrase “land of Ham.” This is not to suggest that the ancients used these labels to refer to the region under observation. Only in the Psalms do we find a reference to the “land of Ham,” and it would be centuries after the biblical world that a “continent” would be dubbed “Africa.” However, I am using these terms *rhetorically* to reinforce the data of Genesis 10. Indeed, it is with the same rhetorical intention that I speak of Canaan, Misrayim, Cush and Put—terms that may not always corroborate the historically correct labels at certain points in history, but which are essential for defining the geographical area under consideration.

Although there are some who would probably prefer that I utilize the standard terms recognized by the scholarly majority, please understand that my use of nonconventional language is intentional. One of the purposes of this work is to encourage people to start thinking differently about history and the biblical world. It is often the conquerors who manipulate our understanding of history and influence the nuances of the dominant language of society. As a David in a sea of Goliaths, this work deliberately resists conforming to standard nomenclature. The stubborn stance is not for the purpose of forwarding a reactionary Afrocentric agenda, but serves to encourage all readers—in spite of ethnicity—to rethink the powerful implications of the language used to convey knowledge. As Cain Hope Felder proposed in his *Troubling Biblical Waters*, this book aims to agitate and educate, but is by no means intended to repudiate.

In developing the work, I am also aware that as victims of a racialized history of interpretation and nomenclature, when most people think about the biblical land of Ham their minds automatically scroll to “black” Africa. The legacy is so deep that few take the time to assess the territory covered by each of Noah’s sons in the Table of Nations. Questions of pigmentation are apparently secondary to the recorder. This is not to say that the various tribes within each sector of Ham could not have exhibited unique ethnic characteristics. But from our vantage point, we will probably never know the original physical characteristics of all of Ham’s progeny. It is for this reason that my primary



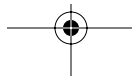
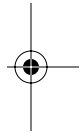


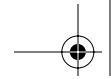
emphasis in this study is on geography and not on our common understanding of “ethnicity.”

While by no means exhaustive—and definitely not encyclopedic, this project is intended to offer a brief survey of the historical place of the Bible in the rhetorical “land of Ham.” Its focus on the boundaries of Ham helps to enhance the ecumenical scope of the project, as contemporary black Africans are drawn into solidarity with their lighter-skinned Hamitic siblings in the northernmost sections of modern continental Africa and the Middle East. This book not only offers information about biblical “Africans” and significant “African” people and events throughout the history of humanity, but it places the story of the Bible and African Christianity in the wider global context.

Part one focuses on a definition of biblical Africa. It commences with a brief synopsis of the major studies on the Bible and Africa then establishes a case for the geographical boundaries of Ham. From a straight reading of the text, it is not difficult to reconstruct the modern geographical regions associated with Canaan, Misrayim and Cush. Put, on the other hand, is more difficult to locate. Notwithstanding, the study operates under the assumption that Put refers to sub-Saharan Africa, a conclusion that will no doubt be challenged, but one that—hopefully—will provide an alternative for those who wish to investigate further. Nonetheless, acceptance of my theory about Put’s location is by no means essential to following the essential thrust of the study. Part one proceeds with chapters offering socio-political discussion on the biblical references to the three most referenced regions of Ham: Cush bears the honor of serving as the cradle for Eden (chapter two), Misrayim was a reliable place of refuge for God’s people (chapter three), and the enigmatic Canaan is the cursed land of promised blessing (chapter four).

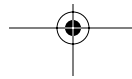
Organized like a “who’s who in the land of Ham,” part two begins with a brief discussion on ethnicity and geographical location. In order to appreciate the comprehensiveness of the study, it is important for the reader to move beyond the stereotypical depiction of how an African “looks.” Archeological evidence from Egypt, Babylon and Assyria depicts a region that was inhabited by people of differing shades, facial features and hair texture. Having established a theory of ethnicity in Scripture, the chapters in part two discuss ethnic Africans in the three major regions of Ham. Each chapter places the Hamitic characters in distinct categories: political personalities, spouses and concubines, citizens and friends of Israel, and believers in Messiah.





Part three discusses the openness of Africans to receiving the biblical message of salvation in the Messiah. It commences with a brief discussion on the preparation of Africa for Christianity as it evaluates the impact of the Israelite/Jewish presence in Canaan, Misrayim and Cush. Many Africans were present on the day of Pentecost, and within two decades after the ascension of Christ, Christianity was entrenched in biblical Africa. This is not only evidenced by the fact that Jerusalem is located in the ancient land of Canaan, but references to African believers suggest a presence in the territories that sprawled from Misrayim and Cush. Providing the social setting for the early church, the Christianity of the former Canaan was the earliest in the land of Ham. In later Christian centuries, the Palestinian center appears to have moved from Jerusalem to Antioch in Syria. Christianity was probably introduced into Cush via Meroe by the eunuch, and it was the work of a Syrian monk that resulted in the Emperor Ezana establishing Christianity as the state religion of Ethiopia in the fourth century. There is no evidence of Ethiopian participation in the ecumenical councils of the church, which probably accounts for the strong Jewish flavor of Ethiopian Christianity. Probably influenced by the Greek legacy of scientific inquiry, the children of Misrayim produced many of the theologians for the early Christian church. It was also in Egypt that the allegorical method of biblical interpretation was born. It is safe to say that by the seventh century, Christianity was the dominant force in north and northeast Africa.

The fourth part of the book traces the growth of Islam in the biblical land of Ham. It starts with a discussion of the fact that as a product of Arabia, Islam was born in biblical Africa. After a brief evaluation of the religious influences on Muhammad, it is suggested that Islam actually started as a heretical Christian reform movement. The Qur'an is obviously based on stories from the Christian Bible and depicts Jesus in a positive light, attesting to his virgin birth, miracles, ascension, esteemed place with the Father and second coming. Some of the fanciful stories about Jesus were actually derived from spurious Christian literature like the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. Similar to some of the early Gnostic leaders, Muhammad saw himself as the comforter promised by Jesus. Part four will argue that although Islam obviously gained ground by wielding the sword, its success was strengthened by the centrality of the Bible in its doctrines. Christians faced with choosing between Islam and death probably felt that they were being forced to join a heretical Christian denomination. Having gained a stronghold in the Arabian section of Cush, Islam

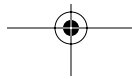




made great strides in North Africa (Misrayim) and Palestine (Canaan). It was not as successful in provincial Ethiopia, which held tenaciously to its Christian heritage. Although “orthodox” Christianity and Judaism survived in these regions, by the end of the Middle Ages, Islam was the dominant force.

Part five examines the impact of European colonialism on biblical Africa. It commences with a brief discussion on the effects of the crusade against Islam on the Orthodox churches in Palestine and Egypt. Chapter fourteen discusses the initial explorations into Ethiopia by the papacy and European monarchs who were fascinated by the legends of the mysterious Prester John. This was followed by an attempt to catholicize Ethiopia which led to civil war and the eventual expulsion of the Jesuit missionaries by King Fasilidas. With the establishment of the West African slave trade, Ham’s fourth son, Put, began to move to the center stage of African Christianity (chapter fifteen). Let me hasten to comment that Put is the only son of Ham who does not have a prominent place in the biblical record, and it is almost impossible to determine the corresponding location from the biblical evidence. Nonetheless, in this work I suggest that the term can be applied to sub-Saharan Africa. Since the term “Put” is used rhetorically, I don’t devote a lot of time to building a detailed case for its location, but I do elevate linguistic theories to make a case for a people with a common heritage. I also mention the prevalence of the culture of the Bible among the disparate tribes in sub-Saharan Africa as evidence of their exposure to the Bible before slavery. Written off as a totally pagan people by nations that claimed to be fulfilling God’s will, the European invaders changed Put’s name to Canaan and justified their oppressive actions with a twisted view of Scripture.

The final major section, part six, evaluates the place of the Bible in the land of Ham in the modern era. Following the consolidations of the Ottoman Empire and the birth of Islamic fundamentalism after the Second World War, Palestine (Canaan) and North Africa (Misrayim) are currently dominated by Islam (chapter sixteen). However, adherents to the Bible still have influence in the persons of repatriated Jews and the remnants of Eastern Orthodoxy. Chapter seventeen looks at the nations in the western areas of Hamitic Cush, which have also managed to maintain their grip on the Bible, although the witness has not always been strong. The most powerful witness to the Bible in recent ages comes from the nations of Put (chapter eighteen). Although introduced to an oppressive brand of Christianity, the sons of Put on the modern





African continent have embraced the biblical message of hope to such an extent that, according to estimates, Africa will soon have the highest concentration of Christians in the entire world. While the success of Christianity in Africa can be partially attributed to the missionary efforts of the colonizing powers, the real secret lies in the ability of the African to adapt Christianity to her own context. While the “mission” churches are still the majority, much of the explosive growth is taking place among the Independent African Christian Churches birthed during and since the colonial era with their own visionary leaders—and they continue to thrive in a land in which the Bible has discovered fertile soil.

