

God's Multi-Ethnic Family Plan, Part 3 – God's Heart for Africa (Genesis 12:1-10)

Preached by Pastor Phil Layton at Gold Country Baptist Church on April 17, 2011

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This study has been near and dear to my heart for several reasons:

- My own family history has had a heart for Africa (my great grandfather was missionary to Congo in 1900, great Aunt born in Congo)
- My own family is pursuing adopting a boy from Congo
- My heart has really been opened to God's heart for Africa, and my eyes have been opened to how much God's Word has to say about Africans, and how many came to true faith in Bible times and also how in modern times in the last 100 years more people in Africa have come to Christ than there are human beings in the United States. One of the greatest explosions of Christianity in history is taking place right now in that continent, but it's not the first time ... true faith was there in Bible times, and the OT prophesied of African nations by name that would bow to Christ in large numbers
- My heart has also been saddened as I see how few people I read have seen any of these things that are all over scripture
- In narrow vision, many miss God's big point for the nations and the nation Israel, and so many have misused scripture to support racist ideas, to suppress Africans, or to segregate Africans to not be in Caucasian church families or families.
- Some oppose so-called "interracial" marriage or adoption or in practice prefer segregated churches, but if they'd only read carefully the first book of the Bible they would see from the start, God's people by God's design have included Africans and all other ethnicities who are welcomed into the family of faith by conversion, and what the world calls "interracial" marriage or adoption (better called *cross-ethnic*) with God's blessing, in God's big multi-ethnic family plan.
- God is glorified in His plan for ethnicity, when a diversity of people worship Christ in unity as the true family of God
- Ephesians and Peter speak of God's multi-colored grace, and the worshipping community of OT Israel and the NT church had many shades and skin tones, and God's grace is magnified 7x in Revelation with every tribe, tongue, nation, people in worship together before Jesus, son of Abraham, a Jew, whose blood was the exact same color and kind as all our ethnicities He redeemed to his family as blood-brothers

Gen 12:3 God tells Abram in him all the families, all the nations on earth will be blessed (incl. Africa) and it begins to happen in the earliest books of the Bible. How many have you have noticed all or any of the following in relation to nations that are on the continent we call Africa?

1. Abram's firstborn son is half-African and marries an African
2. Abram's grandson Jacob, renamed Israel, moves to Africa at God's command, and adopts 2 African-born sons and makes them part of Israel's 12 tribes, and blesses their King
3. An African woman in Genesis becomes one of the few people in Scripture who were blessed with a personal appearance from Yahweh (twice), and she receives a divine promise she would be the mother of a great nation, and she is also one of a few who gives a name for Yahweh (*El-Roi* – the "God who sees")

4. Most of Israel's first 500 years are spent in an African country where they had interactions with many other African peoples, some of whom came to faith in Yahweh and worshipped in the first Passover with Israel and also left with Israel in the Exodus
5. Israel's great leader is adopted by an African and raised African
6. One of Israel's priests, whose name can mean "the Negro" or "the Nubian" is celebrated alongside Moses as one of Israel's 2 great intercessors during the wilderness wandering, and this man is the only other person in the OT besides Abraham who it speaks of God's righteousness reckoned to, using the same phrase of Abraham's covenant grace. The book of Numbers says this priest received an everlasting covenant from Yahweh
7. Arguably the greatest Israelite leader in the OT marries a black African who had come to faith in the God of Abraham, and God Himself defends and commends and blesses that marriage
8. One of Israel's greatest kings history marries a woman who describes her skin to the Jews as "black/dark," in a marriage passage celebrated for all time by the inspiration of God
9. Black Africans had close, friendly relations with Hezekiah, king of Judah, and fought to defend Judah against Assyria
10. These Africans also sent out a large army to relieve a siege against Jews in Jerusalem, that both 2 Kings and Isaiah records
11. King David has one of his black soldiers tell him the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan in battle, and a number of the men in King David's army were from other nations but had come to follow Yahweh (ex: Uriah the Hittite, other Gittites)
12. A black man helps the Jewish prophet Jeremiah out of a well, an African with true faith in Yahweh when few in Israel did
13. The nations of Africa by name are mentioned and prophesied to become recipients of salvation, which began in OT times and is promised in even greater measure before the end of time
14. The land of Cush in black Africa appears in the OT about as many times in the OT as the land of Canaan in the Pentateuch, which is where Canaan's land is repeatedly promised to Israel, but many have never heard of Cush or God's plan for that land
15. The African nation of Egypt is mentioned about as many times as the Jewish nation of Judah in the Bible – nearly 700x!
16. God tells Amos He loves black Africans the same as the Jews
17. Young Jesus lived in Africa before living in Nazareth/Galilee
18. A man from Cyrene in Africa helps Jesus carry His cross, and Romans 16 suggests this man was a believer, or became one
19. In the book of Acts before the gospel goes to the Samaritans or Greeks or Romans, God sends the good news to an African Ethiopian on his way back to his continent, and the eunuch in turn brings the Christian gospel to Africa, according to the church fathers
20. In the place where believers were first called Christians, one of the first church leaders is a man nicknamed "*black*" in Latin
21. The most powerful preacher in the NT, who has the highest language of praise for his power in preaching, Apollos, is a man who Acts says was a native of a prominent city in Africa
22. The Apostle Paul himself on one occasion was mistaken for an African from Egypt. He was asked "aren't you the Egyptian?"

That's all in Scripture, but you probably knew all that already, so we can just close in prayer, right? You say, "but wait, the pictures I have of Paul and the Bible characters are Scandinavian-looking?" At least the good guys all looked American or European, right? ...

- The Last Supper is painted with 12 Europeans at European table
- Moses in Egypt is a fair-haired American Charlton Heston
- The made-for-TV movie on TNT, *Abraham*, has blue-eyed British actor Richard Harris playing Abraham from Iraq
- Kids' picture Bibles usually picture a bunch of white dudes

Daniel Hays, *A Biblical Theology of Race*, edited by D.A. Carson: 'the ethnicity of the characters that lived out the biblical story was not – and did not resemble – that of White Anglo-Americans. Most of the characters in the Bible were Semitic, but the story constantly includes individuals and groups from a wide spectrum of ethnicity ... Black Africans appear early in Genesis and continue to appear throughout the biblical story. Without a doubt, the picture in Revelation that describes God's people as deriving from every tribe, language, people, and nation includes millions [who don't look like us, and shows]...how much "colour" there will be around the throne of God in the climax of history.

Also, it is important that White Christians guard against projecting a 'White' world back into the Bible. There is a tendency in many White Churches to assume that the Bible basically tells a story about White people and that the other races are simply added on as a part of our gracious missionary enterprise [last century]. Pastors and teachers (and film directors) across North America need to correct this misconception and inform their people that neither Abraham, David, nor Paul had blond hair and blue eyes.'¹

In recent decades, a few filmmakers and artists have begun to correct the images burned into our minds growing up, but it's hard to re-program our thinking to recognize a lot of the people we read about in the OT looked a lot more like Sayid than Charlton Heston! There's a whole lot of Arabs and Africans in the Bible, and God's saving plan included them, and also even some Europeans later on, and thousands of years after Genesis, some Americans get blessed!

Genesis 10:1 *Now these are the records of the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood. ...*⁵*From these the coastlands of the nations were separated into their lands, every one according to his language, according to their families, into their nations.*⁶*The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan.*

SEE SLIDES

There is scholarly debate as to the meaning of the name "Ham" (as well as the language Noah spoke when he named his son Ham). In the Egyptian language Moses the writer of Genesis learned growing up, *ham* may come from "dark." We do read later in Genesis of sons named based on appearance at birth (ex: Esau, and Gen 5 says Seth was born after the likeness of Adam). In Hebrew, the root word *hm* meant "wamth, heat or tanned."

Keith Burton says: 'If viewed ethnically, the term most likely reflects the probability that a significant number of Ham's descendants had a darker complexion ... However, it is probably meant to be understood geographically, in which case the term would apply to those regions of the globe that are generally warmer than other. According to Genesis 10:6-20, the four prominent descendants of Ham were named Cush, Misrayim, Put, and Canaan.

Of the four sons, Cush appears to have occupied the largest territory. The Hebrew *Cush*, is probably derived from the Egyptian *ks*, which means “black.” The Greeks translated the word *Ethiopia* [meaning dark or tanned or] “burnt face” – an indication of the dominant feature of those who inhabited the region known to the Greeks ... Cush can be used in a primary sense to define the kingdom(s) lying south of Egypt and in a secondary sense as an organizing term for the many nations to which it gave birth. The kingdom(s) of Cush would have fallen within the modern nations of Sudan, Eritrea, Djibouti, and Ethiopia [when you see *Ethiopia* in the Bible, don’t think of modern Ethiopia’s borders in 20th century, think also of Sudan and south, East African coast, including in ancient times nations called Meroe and Nubia, Nubians/Cushites]

... Ham’s second son was named Misrayim ... [Egypt, also called] *kemi*, “black land.” Some believe that the self-designation *kemi* refers to the black fertile soil on the banks of the Nile. However ... it is possible that similar to *ks/cush*, *kemi* may also have been used to refer to the skin color of the early inhabitants of that region ...

[Ham’s 3rd son Put is not as clear to scholars but Burton suggests] ‘Put is an alternate spelling for the widely known Punt that was located immediately south of Cush and incorporated areas of modern Somalia. Similar to Cush and Misrayim, Put probably referred to a kingdom as well as a broader geographical territory that may have covered ... sub-Saharan Africa ... Put may very well have included the many tribes that currently inhabit central, western, and maybe even southern Africa.’²

SEE SLIDES FOR BELOW

⁷*The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca ...*

¹³*Mizraim became the father of Ludim and Anamim and Lehabim and Naphtuhim¹⁴ and Pathrusim and Casluhim ...*

³²*These are the families of the sons of Noah, according to their genealogies, by their nations; and out of these the nations were separated on the earth after the flood.*

Genesis 12:1 *Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father’s house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so **you shall be a blessing;** ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And **in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.**”*

All families of the earth, all *ethne* in the original language, all ethnicities, all peoples, all clans, all colors, all cultures, are to be blessed in Abram. Genesis later expands and explains this promise as including Abram’s seed or descendants to come (Jews/Jesus). Abram was to be a blessing (v. 2b). Through Abram, all nations on earth were to be blessed (v. 3b), and in context, the families and nations of the earth are what Genesis 10 just spent the whole chapter developing. The blessing is explained in later Scriptures to include salvation blessings, and from the beginning it included the people of what we call Africa today. “Africa” wasn’t yet a word in Bible times, but the phrase “Land of Ham” was used, and Gen 10 gives more space to the descendants of Ham than his brothers. And right after Abram receives this promise, and right after God shows him the Promised Land in this chapter, God’s providence moves Abram and his family down to the Land of Ham, or Africa.

¹⁰ *Now there was a famine in the land; so Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land.*

Gen 12:10 is the first of many God-intended interactions with Abram/Jews and Africans, part of God's multi-ethnic family plan.

NEXT SLIDES

Genesis 16:1 *Now Sarai, Abram's wife had borne him no children, and she had an **Egyptian** maid whose name was Hagar ...* ³*After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan, Abram's wife Sarai took Hagar **the Egyptian**, her maid, and gave her to her husband Abram as his wife.* ⁴*He went in to Hagar, and she conceived ...* [despite Sarai and Abram's sin, the Lord comes and gives grace to this Egyptian pregnant with Abram's son, and the Lord tells her in v. 10] ... *"I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they will be too many to count."* ¹¹*The angel of the LORD said to her further, "Behold, you are with child, And you will bear a son; And you shall call his name Ishmael, Because the LORD has given heed to your affliction ...* ¹³*Then she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God who sees" ['El-Roi']; for she said, "Have I even remained alive here after seeing Him?"*

In Genesis 21:13 God also reaffirms the promise of Abram's half-African firstborn son: *"And of the son of the maid I will make a **nation also, because he is your descendant.**"*

And in v. 18 He gives grace to Hagar and Ishmael, reiterating this:

¹⁸*"Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him by the hand, for I will make a great nation of him." ...*

²⁰*God was with the lad* [Abram's firstborn, and the end of v. 21 says he was married to an African Egyptian]

This was the first of a number of Abraham's descendants that were married to Africans, who were blessed through the family of faith they were brought into. Genesis 41 records that through the line of Isaac as well, Abraham's son in line of Messiah, Isaac's grandson Joseph is blessed by God in his marriage to Asenath, who is from the land of On in Africa, part of the ancient kingdom of Misrayim at the time. If you look at Gen 46, God sends Israel/Jacob to Egypt.

46:2 *God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." ³He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. ⁴I will go down with you to Egypt...*

47:7 *Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and **Jacob blessed Pharaoh.** [Abram's descendant, also named Israel, is blessing one of the nations of the earth, Gen 12:3, and his son blessed Egypt and many nations on earth in the famine]*

... ¹⁰*And Jacob blessed Pharaoh ...*

And in Genesis 48, Jacob blesses the 2 African born sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, treating them as his firstborns (48:5), Jacob adopts these sons of the African Asenath into the family of Israel, giving them not only an inheritance with the 12 sons of Israel but making them part of the Tribes of Israel. Israel's tribes had African blood from the start.

48:9 Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.” So he said, “Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.” [and he invokes the covenant blessing and grace of Abraham, and Isaac in v. 15 and in the middle of v. 16 he says] ... ***Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them*** [the name of Israel!], ***And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.*** ...²⁰ ***He blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’ ”*** [For generations to come, these African-born sons become the prototype of blessing for Israelites to be blessed!]

Now look at Exodus 12. African non-Jews joined Israel’s exodus.

Exodus 12:37 *Now the sons of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand men on foot, aside from children.*³⁸ ***A mixed multitude also went up with them ...***⁴¹ ***And at the end of four hundred and thirty years, to the very day, all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt ...***

It’s not just Egyptians who went up with them, the word “mixed” indicates a mixture of ethnicities, and “multitude” means it was a good number, all God’s hosts. What mixed multitudes were in Egypt? It was a place many nations came to, people from Canaan as well as the other sons of Ham in Africa mingled, and God has Israel here to bless these many nations from Gen 10. ***SLIDES***

Ancient records and artwork from early Bible times consistently portrays the people from Cush as the darkest skinned, and even today there (Sudan) are still some of the blackest of all Africans. The prophet Jeremiah asks the rhetorically obviously in Jeremiah 13:23 “*Can the Cushite change his skin or the leopard its spots?*” His point is we can’t change us inside anymore than a black man can change his outside skin color. But the prophets also make clear God has a plan for black Africans and other tones, tongues, tribes. From the time of Moses, God brings into His multi-ethnic family.

Turn forward to Number 12 for a moment. The blessing of nations in Genesis 10:6, Egypt, Cush, and Put, and their inclusion into the family of faith continues at the highest level of Jewish believers. Numbers is a book a lot of Christians don’t take the time to read, and probably many of you in this room have never noticed this:

Numbers 12:1 ***Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman) ...***

Hays thoroughly documents how in the time of Moses, a Cushite meant black African from what today is Sudan/Ethiopia. “it is quite clear that Moses marries a Black woman...The term ‘Cushite’ is repeated twice in Numbers 12:1, probably for stress. Throughout the ancient world this term carried strong connotations of Black ethnicity. Ancient readers of this text would visualize a Black woman from the region south of Egypt ... The ethnicity of Moses’ new wife is stressed and then opposition arises within the family...[he also documents extrabiblical Jewish writing confirming Moses’ marriage to a black Cushite]...Throughout the entire period ... of the Hebrew Bible, the term ‘Cush’ would have been understood to refer to the Black inhabitants of the civilization south of Egypt ... (Miriam and Aaron) object to this interracial marriage, but Yahweh approves.”³

⁴*Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, “You three come out to the tent of meeting.” So the three of them came out. ⁵Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud and stood at the doorway of the tent, and He called Aaron and Miriam. When they had both come forward, ⁶He said, “Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, shall make Myself known to him in a vision. I shall speak with him in a dream. ⁷“Not so, with My servant Moses, **He is faithful in all My household ...***

Miriam and Aaron use this occasion to try to undermine Moses as a leader and God’s spokesman, for this marriage to a black woman, but God is the one who opposes those who oppose this marriage, and God makes clear Moses is faithful and has done nothing wrong

⁹*So the anger of the LORD burned against them and He departed. ¹⁰But when the cloud had withdrawn from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, as white as snow ...*

Miriam spoke against her Jewish brother’s marriage to a black woman, and God makes Miriam white as snow in judgment! John Piper comments: ‘What is most significant about this context is that God does not get angry at Moses; he gets angry at Miriam for criticizing Moses. The criticism has to do with Moses’s marriage and Moses’s authority ... consider this possibility. In God’s anger at Miriam, Moses’s sister, God says in effect, “You like being light-skinned Miriam? I’ll make you light-skinned.” God says not a critical word against Moses for marrying a black, Cushite woman. But when Miriam criticizes God’s chosen leader for this marriage God strikes her skin with white leprosy. If you ever thought black was a biblical symbol for uncleanness, be careful; a worse white uncleanness could come upon you.’⁴

The Torah forbid Israelites from marrying Canaanites who were unbelievers, but foreigners who believe in Yahweh could marry into the Israelite community with God’s blessing (Rahab, Ruth). Hays writes that Israel’s leader marrying “a Black Cushite should also probably be viewed as a developing fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (‘all peoples on earth will be blessed through you’). The promise to Abraham in Genesis drives much of the story in the rest of the Torah and the inclusion of one of the peoples from Genesis 10 (Cush) into the ‘sons of Israel’ is a move toward fulfillment of that promise.’⁵

It’s also significant that one of the priests in the multitude/hosts of Israel in this book is named Phinehas, which is an Egyptian name meaning ‘the Negro’ or ‘the Nubian’ or ‘the Cushite.’ At least 9 scholars have demonstrated this name’s meaning in Egypt, that it ‘connotes either a person with unusually dark skin or a true African.’ Hays sums up how Phinehas is ‘a central figure in the story of the priesthood ... The text in Numbers 25 is particularly significant ... It is striking that someone other than Moses intervenes to save Israel from Yahweh’s wrath ... [Israel] hovers on the brink of civil war (Josh. 22:12) until Phinehas leads a delegation to discuss and correct the problem ... Phinehas is the only leader other than Joshua that takes the initiative in any action within the book ... Yahweh bestows the priesthood on Phinehas and all his descendants ... Phinehas’ zealous defence of Yahweh becomes a model for subsequent generations ... as Psalm 106 reflects back over Israel’s stormy history, it places Phinehas (106:30-31) along-side Moses (23, 32-33) as the two great intercessors of the wilderness time. [Psalm 106:] *Phinehas stood up and intervened ... This was credited to him as righteousness for endless generations ...*

... The phrase referring to the crediting (*hasab*) something to someone as righteousness (*se'daqa*) only occurs in one other place. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham believes God and God credits to him as righteousness... In Galatians 3, Paul uses this phrase (from Genesis 15:6) to prove that Gentiles are justified by faith and thus to be accepted into the church as equal to Jews. It is therefore, rather interesting to note that this phrase is used of Phinehas ... [who] might very well have had a Cushite mother and therefore might have looked like a Cushite at birth, thus receiving the name 'the Negro' [which in the land they grew up in meant a black person].

... Imagine the different route American Christianity might have travelled if the translators of the King James Bible had known Egyptian and had thus translated 'Phinehas' as 'the Negro'. The early Americans would have read that God made an eternal covenant with 'the Negro', that all legitimate Israelite priests are descended from 'the Negro', and that God credited righteousness to 'the Negro' ... it would have been extremely difficult to defend slavery or to maintain any type of superior-inferiority racial views.

While the meaning of Phinehas' name is absolutely clear, the significance of this meaning is admittedly not quite as certain. However ... it is extremely probable that Phinehas was at least half Black. When combined with the 'mixed multitude' of Exodus 12:38 and the Cushite wife of Moses, Phinehas reveals to us that there was a significant presence of Cushites among the early Israelites... at its beginning, the highest level of Israelite priesthood apparently had Black ethnic elements with it ... As God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 (blessing to all peoples) unfolds, numerous different ethnicities are melded into the people of God in fulfilment of this promise ... Moses, the hero of the Torah, marries a Black woman with God's approval.'⁶

Here's another one in Song of Solomon 1:5, Solomon's bride says: "*I am black but lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, Like the tents of Kedar, Like the curtains of Solomon.*"

Our kids's picture Bibles might have all white characters, but there's a lot more color in the real Bible. I grew up thinking Africans started getting saved when whites missionaries brought the gospel to the "dark continent" in the 19th-20th century?! Wrong! They were being saved thousands of years before the US or Britain existed. Christianity flourished in Africa before Europe and even though the African continent was sadly set back by heterodoxy, Islam, the Dark Ages, the slave trade, and other evils, God's saving purposes for Africa have always had a remnant of believers in the true faith since the very beginning of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Amos 9:7 (ESV) "*Are you not like the Cushites to me, O people of Israel?*" declares the LORD. "*Did I not bring up Israel from the land of Egypt ... [God seems to be telling Israel, He cares for Israel just as He does for the Cushites/Africans, v. 12 adds] ... all the nations who are called by my name,*" declares the LORD ...

Red, yellow, black, and white really are precious in God's sight. He loves the Jews greatly and uses them to reach other people He loves greatly as well, and in fact, African nations are listed out in Acts 2, and Philip the Jew evangelizes the eunuch from Ethiopia, and one of the early church leaders in Acts 13 is Simeon, called *Niger* (the Greco-Roman word for "black" was his nickname) and he is the one who is associated with that quotation from Amos in Acts 15 in the context of the Jewish church, where they say of non-Jews "it is by the grace of Jesus they are saved, just as we are ..."

Revelation 7⁹ *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, **from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues**, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;*¹⁰ *and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation to **our God** who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.”*

¹ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every Tribe and Tongue: A Biblical Theology of Race*, p. 201-202.

² Burton, *The Blessing of Africa*, p. 23-28.

³ Hays, p. 71-75.

⁴ <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/racial-harmony-and-interracial-marriage>

⁵ Hays, 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-86.