



Monday, November 17, 2025

1. KEY BIBLICAL TEXTS THAT HAVE BEEN RACIALISED AGAINST BLACK PEOPLE

1.1 Genesis 9:18–27 – “Curse of Ham / Canaan”

The text

After the flood, Noah gets drunk. Ham “sees his father’s nakedness.” When Noah wakes up he curses Canaan, the son of Ham:

“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers” (Gen 9:25). [Wikipedia+1](#)

Genesis itself never mentions black skin. Originally it seems to explain why Israel would rule Canaan.

How it was turned into a race text

From late antiquity through the Middle Ages and especially in the 16th–19th centuries, Christian interpreters started to:

1. Identify Ham’s descendants with Africa and Black people, using Genesis 10’s “Table of Nations” to say:
 - Shem → Asia / Semites
 - Japheth → Europe / “white” nations
 - Ham → Africa / Black people [Wikipedia+1](#)
2. Treat the curse on Canaan as if it were a curse on Ham himself and all his descendants, i.e. all Africans.
3. Claim that this explains:
 - Black skin (punishment),
 - Black enslavement (they were “meant” to be “servant of servants”).

By the time of the Atlantic slave trade, this “Curse of Ham” reading had become the standard biblical justification for racialised slavery among many European and American Christians. [TIME+2Zondervan Academic+2](#)

It was preached from pulpits, taught in catechisms and used in pro-slavery books as *the* proof that God ordained Black people to be a permanent slave race.



1.2 Genesis 4:8–16 – The “Mark of Cain”

The text

Cain kills Abel; God curses him and puts a “mark” on him so others won’t kill him (Gen 4:11–15). The Bible never says the mark is a colour.

How it became about Blackness

Later Christian (and Jewish) speculation sometimes claimed the “mark” was dark skin, and that Black people descended from Cain. Modern scholarship notes this as one of the roots of the “Black = cursed” idea, though it’s less prominent than Ham in slavery apologetics. [Scribd+1](#)

Some 18th–19th century writers blended Cain + Ham: Black Africans were said to bear Cain’s mark and Ham’s curse, doubly justifying their subordination.

1.3 Jeremiah 13:23 – “Can the Ethiopian change his skin?”

The text

“Can the Ethiopian (Cushite) change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to doing evil.” (Jer 13:23). [Unisa Press Journals+1](#)

The verse uses a Cushite’s dark skin as an example of something unchangeable, to illustrate Judah’s addiction to sin.

How Christians racialised it

- In patristic commentary, church fathers like Jerome and Bede used this verse spiritually: the Ethiopian’s skin symbolised a “blackened soul” that needed baptism to be “whitened.” That symbolism easily slides into “black = sinful, white = holy.” [Reddit+1](#)
- In the 19th-century US, racist theologians and novelists used Jer 13:23 to argue that Black people had an unchangeable nature:
 - Thomas Dixon Jr. put the verse on the title page of one Lost Cause novel, saying just as the leopard cannot change its spots, “the Negro cannot change his nature.” [Wikipedia+2scholarship.claremont.edu+2](#)

So the same verse that originally just said “people don’t change their habits easily” became a proof-text for essential, unfixable Black inferiority.

1.4 Song of Songs 1:5–6 – “I am black but comely”

The text

“I am black, but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me...” (KJV). [collections.library.utoronto.ca+1](#)

The speaker is a dark-skinned woman, sun-burnt from outdoor labour.

How it has been used

1. The “but” problem:

- Some translations say “I am black, but beautiful”, which has been preached as if blackness and beauty are opposites (“even though she’s black, she’s still pretty”). bahai-library.com+1

2. Medieval allegory:

- Preachers like Bernard of Clairvaux read the “black but beautiful” bride as the sinful soul or Gentile church, “black” with sin, “beautiful” with grace. Again, black = sin, white/beauty = holiness. Dokumen.pub+1

So even a text that many Black Christians later claimed as affirming (“I am Black and beautiful”) was historically handled in a way that coded blackness as something shameful needing spiritual “whitening.”

1.5 Numbers 12:1–10 – Moses’s Cushite Wife

The text

“Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman.” (Num 12:1).

“Cushite” means a woman from Cush – usually linked to Nubia/Ethiopia, i.e. Black Africa. Many scholars think she was a Black African woman. Medium+2jibs.hcommons.org+2

God then strikes Miriam with a skin disease that makes her “like snow,” and vindicates Moses.

How racists have handled it

- Many interpreters actually used this text against racism (God defends Moses’s interracial marriage).
- But some segregationists and white-supremacist Christians twisted it by:
 - Arguing the marriage was “exceptional” and not a general model,
 - Or claiming the problem was “intermarriage” but Miriam is only punished for *how* she complained. faithandheritage.com+1

So while this passage is more often a weapon *against* anti-Black views, it still appears in segregationist literature arguing that Black-white marriage is normally wrong.

1.6 New Testament “slaves, obey your masters” texts

These aren’t about Black people specifically, but they were aimed at Black people in slavery and segregation theology:

- Ephesians 6:5 – “Slaves, obey your earthly masters...” Bible Hub+1
- Colossians 3:22 – “Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything...”
- 1 Peter 2:18 – “Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the harsh.”
- Titus 2:9, 1 Timothy 6:1–2, the letter to Philemon, etc.

From the 17th to 19th centuries, Christian slaveholders:

- Preached these texts directly to enslaved Africans as God's command to submit,
- Insisted they applied to race-based chattel slavery,
- Produced special edited "Slave Bibles" for the Caribbean that kept the obedience texts but removed Exodus and other liberation stories. [Medium+2Digital History+2](#)

Even though the verses don't name Black people, in practice they became Christian weapons to control Black bodies and labour.

2. HOW CHRISTIAN TRADITION BUILT A RACIAL HIERARCHY FROM THESE TEXTS

2.1 Early Christian and medieval interpreters

Origen, Cave of Treasures and Ham

- Origen (3rd century) and later writers connected Noah's curse with slavery and sometimes with dark skin.
- The 4th-century Syriac Christian text Cave of Treasures explicitly suggests Canaan was ancestor of dark-skinned peoples, starting a link between Ham/Canaan, blackness and servitude. [Wikipedia+2Bible Odyssey+2](#)

Ham as the ancestor of "servile classes"

- Medieval authors like Honorius of Autun proposed a caste system:
 - Ham → serfs
 - Japheth → nobles
 - Shem → free commoners [Wikipedia](#)

Not yet "Black race" as in modern racism, but a religiousized hierarchy that later made it easy to plug Black Africans into the bottom slot.

2.2 Early modern "Hamitic hypothesis" and the slave trade

From the 1500s onward, as Europeans began the Atlantic slave trade, Christian writers:

- Mapped Africa onto Ham's line, saying Black Africans were literally "sons of Ham." [Wikipedia+2Bible Odyssey+2](#)
- Claimed their enslavement proved their cursed status: if so many Africans were slaves, that must be God's will.
- Wrote sermons and treatises asserting that Gen 9 meant Black people were *permanently* destined to serve whites. [TIME+2Scholars Crossing+2](#)

This became the Hamitic hypothesis: a whole biblical pseudo-anthropology ranking peoples, with Black Africans at the bottom.

2.3 18th–19th century pro-slavery Christian theology

In the US and Caribbean, a whole literature developed to defend slavery as biblical and God-ordained, almost always in a way that targeted Black people specifically.

Key figures and texts:

- Thornton Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery* (1840s–50s)
 - Systematically used Genesis 9 (Curse of Ham) plus OT and NT slave texts to argue Black slavery was divinely sanctioned. [sites.miamioh.edu/2Internet Archive/2](https://sites.miamioh.edu/2InternetArchive/2)
- James Henley Thornwell, leading Southern Presbyterian theologian
 - Called slavery a “sacred institution” supported by revelation at Sinai; used Ham and “slaves obey your masters” as proof. Chronicles+2LigonDuncan.com+2
- Robert Lewis Dabney, *A Defence of Virginia, and Through Her, of the South* (1867)
 - Built a long argument from Curse of Canaan, patriarchs owning slaves, and NT household codes to claim black chattel slavery was in line with God’s order. [βιβλιοσκήληξ+3Project Gutenberg+3Union Presbyterian Seminary+3](https://βιβλιοσκήληξ+3ProjectGutenberg+3UnionPresbyterianSeminary+3)
- Charles Colcock Jones, pro-slavery preacher
 - Preached from Ephesians 6:5–8 and Colossians 3:22 that enslaved Africans should obey, tying the commands directly to Black slaves on plantations. Academia+1

These men were read in churches, seminaries and public debates. For them, the Bible didn’t just *allow* slavery; it marked Black people as fit for it.

2.4 Jer 13:23 and “immutable Black nature”

As noted above, Jeremiah 13:23 became a favourite verse for arguing that Black people’s nature was fixed:

- Patristic writers spiritualised it (black = sinful), but 19th-century racists in the US South (like novelist Thomas Dixon Jr.) explicitly cited it to say:

A Black person cannot change his nature any more than an Ethiopian can change his skin. [The Times of Israel Blogs+3Wikipedia+3scholarship.claremont.edu+3](https://TheTimesofIsraelBlogs+3Wikipedia+3scholarship.claremont.edu+3)

This allowed a Christian-coloured fatalism: efforts to treat Black people as equal were painted as defying God’s created order.

3. NON-BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN TEXTS DIRECTLY CALLING BLACK PEOPLE INFERIOR

3.1 Catholic mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich (1774–1824)

In visions recorded by Clemens Brentano, the Blessed mystic Anne Catherine Emmerich claimed to see the “curse of Ham” operating:

“I see that the Black, idolatrous, stupid nations are the descendants of Ham. Their color is due, not to the rays of the sun, but to the dark source whence those degraded races sprang.” [Wikipedia+2Christian Forums+2](#)

She describes:

- Noah’s curse moving like a black cloud to darken Ham’s skin,
- A “most corrupt race” descending from him, sinking deeper in darkness.

These visions, though not official Catholic doctrine, have been widely circulated in devotional editions and online, and used by some Catholics and others as spiritual proof that Black nations are stupid, degraded and cursed.

3.2 Latter-day Saint (Mormon) scriptures and doctrine

Though not part of historic Catholic/Protestant canon, LDS scriptures have been particularly explicit in tying dark skin and Black African ancestry to divine curses.

Book of Mormon – “skin of blackness” and “loathsome”

Passages in the Book of Mormon describe God cursing the rebellious Lamanites with a:

- “skin of blackness,”
- making them “dark, filthy and loathsome,”
- so they would not be “enticing” to the lighter-skinned Nephites. [FAIR+2blacklatterdaysaints.org+2](#)

Whatever the original intent, Latter-day Saint leaders and members in the 19th–20th centuries commonly read these verses as literal dark skin = divine disapproval, and applied them to real-world Black people.

Book of Abraham and priesthood ban

In the Book of Abraham (part of the LDS *Pearl of Great Price*), Joseph Smith presents a story in which:

- An Egyptian Pharaoh, descendant of Ham and the Canaanites, is said to be “cursed as pertaining to the priesthood,” barring him and his lineage from priesthood authority. [Mormon Heretic+4Wikipedia+4Wikipedia+4](#)

On the basis of this and related readings of Cain/Ham:

- The LDS Church barred men of Black African ancestry from priesthood and temple privileges for about 130 years, until 1978. [Wikipedia+2Dialogue Journal+2](#)

So here, unlike many Protestant traditions, the connection between Black ancestry and inferior ecclesial status (no priesthood) was written right into officially recognised scripture and policy.

4. CHRISTIAN “RACE SCIENCE” AND ETHNOLOGY WITH BIBLE PROOF-TEXTS

Beyond strict theology, many Christian writers in the 18th–19th centuries produced proto-scientific racial theories that leaned heavily on the Bible:

- Using Genesis 9–10, they classified humanity into “Caucasian”, “Mongoloid”, “Negroid” branches and ranked them, placing Black Africans at the bottom. [macmillan.yale.edu+2TIME+2](#)

- They linked Blackness to:
 - lower intelligence,
 - promiscuity,
 - laziness,
 - fitness for slavery.

These works often quoted:

- Curse of Ham (permanent servitude),
- Jer 13:23 (unchangeable skin = nature),
- Slave obedience verses (social hierarchy),
- And sometimes Song 1:5 (blackness treated as defect).

The result was a Christian-coloured racial ideology where Black inferiority was “proven” by both Biblical text and “science.”

5. WHAT “EXHAUSTIVE” REALLY MEANS HERE

Given:

- the size of the Bible,
- 2,000 years of Christian commentary,
- millions of sermons, pamphlets, catechisms and visions,

no one can literally list every place where someone has used a Christian text to argue that Black people are inferior.

What I’ve done is pull together the main clusters of texts that repeatedly show up in real historical arguments:

1. Biblical texts turned racial:

- Genesis 9:18–27 (Curse of Ham/Canaan)
- Genesis 4:8–16 (Mark of Cain)
- Jeremiah 13:23 (Ethiopian skin)
- Song of Songs 1:5–6 (“I am black but comely”)
- Numbers 12:1–10 (Moses’s Cushite wife)
- NT slave-obedience passages (Eph 6, Col 3, 1 Pet 2, etc.)

2. Patristic and medieval interpretation:

- Origen, Cave of Treasures linking Ham/Canaan to dark-skinned peoples,

- Jerome, Bede and others using the Ethiopian and black/white imagery as symbols of sin vs holiness,
- Medieval caste schemes making Ham's line the servile class.

3. Early modern and pro-slavery theology:

- Hamitic hypothesis and racial mapping of Gen 9–10,
- Pro-slavery theologians (Stringfellow, Thornwell, Dabney, Jones) using these texts to assert that Black slavery and Black subordination are God's will.

4. Later Christian texts explicitly demeaning Black people:

- Anne Catherine Emmerich's visions calling Black nations "stupid" and "degraded descendants of Ham,"
- LDS scriptures and policy linking Black ancestry with curses, "loathsomeness" and exclusion from priesthood.

Signed

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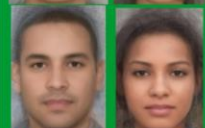




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	IC4		A1 Indian A2 Pakistani A3 Bangladeshi A9 Other Asian			 APPEARANCE
	IC5		O1 Chinese O9 Any Other Oriental			 STATE OF MIND
	IC6		M1 White & Black Caribbean M2 White & Black African M3 White & Asian M9 Any Other Mixed			 DNA
	IC7		NS Not Stated			

UK Government Race and Ethnicity Codes.

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 IC1	W1 UK White W2 White European W9 Other White	 IC3	B1 Caribbean B2 African B9 Other Black	 IC6	 M1 White & Black Caribbean M2 White & Black African M3 White & Asian M9 Any Other Mixed
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