

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

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One of the legacies of slavery in the United States is the lingering refusal of many white Christians to accept interracial marriages. This article will explore the biblical perspective regarding interracial or inter-ethnic marriage.¹ First, a short overview will be presented discussing the problem of interracial marriage and reviewing the connection between the prohibition of interracial marriage today—even in the church—and the underlying racism that has produced such prohibitions. Then the paper will focus on biblical texts relating to this issue. Moses' marriage to a black Cushite woman (Num 12:1) will be a primary text. A brief history of interpretation of this text will be presented, underscoring some of the flimsy and shallow exegesis that has been used by white scholarship in the past to argue that this wife of Moses is not really black. Then historical and exegetical arguments will be presented to demonstrate that this wife of Moses is definitely a black African. This discussion will include a brief overview of the term "Cush" and the historical data that clearly underscores the black African physical appearance of the Cushites. Next, other interracial or inter-ethnic marriages in the Bible will be presented briefly. The biblical prohibitions against intermarrying will be explored, and the article will point out that these prohibitions are based on theology and faith, rather than racial difference. In fact, in the Torah the prohibition is generally against intermarrying with the Canaanites, who ethnically are the most similar people to the Israelites in the

¹This article represents the culmination of my study on interracial marriage over the past dozen years. I have written previously on related subjects in: "The Cushites: A Black Nation in Ancient History," *BSac* 153 (1996): 270–280; "Moses: The Private Man Behind the Public Figure," *BibRev* 16 (2000): 16–26, 60–62; and *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003). Portions from these works which I have included in this article have been revised, updated and expanded.

entire Ancient Near East. On the other hand, God explicitly approves Moses' marriage to the black Cushite, who is quite a bit different ethnically. Next, Paul's New Testament perspective of being united together "in Christ" will be discussed in light of the Old Testament examples of interracial marriage. Finally, the theological implications for the church today will be presented.

I. INTRODUCTION

Interracial marriage lies at the very heart of race relations. Indeed, Randall Kennedy, in his recent book *Interracial Intimacies*, writes that "the issues it raises test uniquely the contours of our deepest beliefs and intuitions, fears and hopes about race, race relations, and the American future."² This holds true for those within the church as well. Harold Myra writes in *Christianity Today*, "Nothing brings out our hidden, forgotten prejudices like interracial marriages."³ Surprisingly, there has been very little biblical study or theological reflection on this topic. Even though this is one of the most critical and crucial social issues in the church today, our seminaries and Christian universities rarely address it, and it is virtually absent from the major textbooks used to train pastors in theology (both systematic theology and practical theology). Likewise, even in our major ethics textbooks—which often directly address the problem of racial prejudice in the church—discussions of interracial marriage are rare. This article is an attempt to help fill that void.

Although the Civil War ended slavery as a legal institution, most states in the post-Civil War era, both in the North and in the South, continued to outlaw black-white interracial marriages through so-called "antimiscegenation" laws. In 1913, Wyoming became the 42nd state to enact an antimiscegenation law, and the remaining states without such laws were those that had black populations of less than 5 percent. Although during the 1950s and the early 1960s many states repealed their antimiscegenation laws, it was not until 1967 that the Supreme Court finally ruled that such laws were unconstitutional, eliminating them from the last sixteen states.⁴

Throughout history the church has often struggled to maintain a biblical view on issues in the face of strong pressure to the contrary from the society. The strong emotional—sometimes nearly hysterical—opposition to interracial marriage that much of the white population, both in the North and in the South, brought into the twentieth century undoubtedly continues to exert a powerful influence on whites within the church even today,

²Randall Kennedy, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption* (New York: Pantheon, 2003) 33.

³Harold Myra, "Love in Black and White," *Christianity Today* (Mar 7, 1994): 18.

⁴U. S. Supreme Court, *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U. S. 1 (1967).

influencing nominal Christians and strong Christians alike.⁵ Although progress toward overcoming racial division in the church has been achieved in several areas in the last 40 years, many in white churches continue to vehemently oppose interracial or inter-ethnic marriages. Especially in the South, youth ministers who successfully bring a diversity of young people into their church programs frequently run into trouble once kids of different colors start to date. Rather than being commended for their successful outreach, these youth ministers often see their ministry (and their jobs) challenged by stalwart members of the church. Many faithful and active Southern Baptists (my own tradition) are still strongly—indeed, almost violently—opposed to interracial marriages, especially between blacks and whites.

However, the interracial marriage issue lies at the very heart of racial prejudice within the church. Church historian Elizabeth Isichei writes, “Inter-ethnic marriage is the litmus test of racial prejudice.”⁶ Many of our church members would affirm racial equality and view themselves as being accepting of other races. They would not consider themselves as being prejudiced or racist at all. However, many of these same Christians strongly oppose the marriage of anyone in their family to someone of another race or ethnicity. They often assume that the Bible supports them on this. But does the Bible actually oppose interracial marriage? What is the biblical view towards interracial or inter-ethnic marriage?

II. THE FORMATION OF ISRAEL

Exodus 1:1–5 recounts how Jacob (Israel) and his sons moved from Canaan to Egypt. The biblical record tells us that for the next four centuries this family resided in Egypt. It is during this time that Jacob’s “family” transforms into something larger. They become an identifiable entity, a tribe, a people, or even a nation.⁷ Recall their brief history. Originating in Mesopotamia, the family is comprised of Aramean or Amorite elements. They probably speak some form of a Northwest Semitic language. After arriving in Canaan, their language probably begins to be influenced heavily by their Canaanite neighbors. They may actually become speakers of Canaanite. A few of them (Judah, Simeon) marry Canaanite women. Joseph, on the other hand, marries an Egyptian. This family, a mixed group with Aramean, Canaanite, and Egyptian elements, then spends 400 years in

⁵This article focuses primarily on the tensions and divisions between white Christians and black Christians on this topic. However, animosity and misunderstanding in regard to interracial marriage often runs high in many ethnic communities, both here in North America and abroad.

⁶Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 107.

⁷The definition and applicability of these terms to Israel is currently being debated in OT scholarship. The fine semantic distinction between terms like “tribe,” “people,” and “nation,” however, are not critical to this aspect of our study.

Egypt, some of this time under the oppression of slavery. It is probably during this time that they begin to develop a sense of “ethnic” identity. Their Semitic dialect probably develops into the separate language that we know as Hebrew. One of the main unifying and identifying factors is their common origin and thus they become known as the “sons of Israel.”⁸ Likewise their tribal identification (Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, etc.) also remains strong, and throughout their history they will frequently disintegrate into tribal entities and fight along tribal lines. However, the central unifying and identifying feature of this people is their covenant relationship that Yahweh (the LORD) will form with them in the book of Exodus. Thus one of the major boundaries that will distinguish this “ethnic group” (called the “sons of Israel”) from other groups is a theological one and not merely a biological one. To be part of the covenant relationship with Yahweh is as critical a factor of identity as any other, at least from the viewpoint of the biblical books in the Torah.

Exodus 1–11 narrates the call of Moses, his confrontation with Pharaoh, and the judgmental plagues that Yahweh strikes upon Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh “orders” the Israelites to leave. Exodus 12 describes the climactic deliverance of the Israelites—the actual departure of the “sons of Israel” from Egypt. As the Israelites set out to leave Egypt on their trip to the Promised Land, the text comments, “A *mixed crowd* also went up with them” (Exod 12:38, NRSV). What are the implications of the term translated “a mixed crowd”? The clear stress of the Hebrew term used (*‘ēreb*) is that these people were non-Israelites.⁹ Peter Enns writes that this term indicates an “ethnic mixture of peoples.”¹⁰ Propp also understands the word to refer to foreigners.¹¹ Fretheim likewise comments, “Many non-

⁸The term “sons of Israel” occurs but four times in Genesis and refers to the literal sons of Jacob (Israel). The term occurs 125 times in Exodus, however, and refers to the entire nation. Most modern translations (NIV, NRSV, NLT) translate the phrase as “Israelites.” The ESV translates the phrase as “people of Israel.” The NASB is one of the few to retain the literal “sons of Israel.” The KJV uses the more gender inclusive phrase “children of Israel.” The other term used to designate the descendants of Abraham is “Hebrew.” This term may reflect more of a sociological “ethnicity” rather than a political one. D. N. Freedman and B. E. Willoughby (“*ibri*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, X: 431) summarize the usage of this term by stating, “The expression defines an ethnic group with no negative connotations. In a general sense the term was used by foreigners with reference to proto-Israelites or by the latter themselves as a self-designation over against foreigners. After the founding of the Israelite state, the term *‘ibri* [Hebrew] fell into disuse except in archaic passages.”

⁹Note the usage of this word in clear reference to foreigners in Neh 13:3; Jer 25:20, 24; 50:37.

¹⁰Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan) 251.

¹¹William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 414.

Israelites were integrated into the community of faith.”¹² Durham translates the phrase as “a large and motley group,” and states, “that there were many who became Israelites by theological rather than biological descendancy is many times referred to in the OT.”¹³ Brueggemann concludes, “the phrase suggests that this is no kinship group, no ethnic community, but a great conglomeration of lower-class folk This term is important for the view that earliest Israel was not an ethnic community.”¹⁴

Who were these foreigners? Were they Egyptians? Other nationalities? Where did they come from and what were they doing in Egypt? Ancient Egyptian literary records can assist us here, for they are replete with references to foreigners in Egypt during this time period.¹⁵ Indeed, during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties (1550–1200 BC), the period encompassing the events of the Exodus, the Egyptians had nominal control over both Cush and Syria-Palestine. During this time the Egyptians carried out numerous military campaigns into these regions and brought back thousands of conquered peoples to Egypt as slaves and laborers.¹⁶ It is highly likely that these people constituted the “mixed crowd” of Exod 12:38.¹⁷ This group would be comprised of both Semitic and non-Semitic peoples.

Of particular interest to us is the degree to which the black Africans of Cush would have been part of this group. Cush was the country along the Nile to the immediate south of Egypt, in what is now the modern country of Sudan. Historians often refer to this country as Nubia, following later Latin terminology. Also confusing the situation is that fact that the Greeks called everything south of Egypt by the term “Ethiopia.” So some sources today, even some Bibles, translate the term “Cush” with Ethiopia, even though ancient Cush was fairly far removed from what is now modern Ethiopia. Both ancient literature and ancient artistic portrayals of the Cushites indicate that they were black Africans.¹⁸ The Egyptian literary records of the period frequently mention Cushite slaves/laborers being brought back to Egypt.¹⁹

¹²Terrence Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1991) 143.

¹³John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1987) 169.

¹⁴Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Exodus,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 1, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) 781.

¹⁵Anthony Leahy, “Ethnic Diversity in Ancient Egypt,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) 225–34; Edda Bresciani, “Foreigners,” in *The Egyptians*, ed. S. Donadoni (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1997) 221–53.

¹⁶Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 1992) 214–37.

¹⁷James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 112–16.

¹⁸See Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 34–39.

¹⁹James H. Breasted (*Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906]) cites several specific references in Egyptian documents to Cushite (Nubian) slaves during the reigns of Eighteenth Dynasty Pharaohs (1570–1305 BC): Ahmose I (II:14), Amenhotep I (II:39, 41), and Thutmose III (II:495, 502–503). Evidence of Cushite slaves/laborers in Egypt is not

In fact, although Cushites had been in Egypt for centuries, it is precisely during the time of the Exodus story (Eighteenth or Nineteenth Dynasties) that they arrive in Egypt in great numbers.²⁰ Not all of these Cushites were slaves. During this time period Cushites were also found at other levels of Egyptian society as well. There is clear documentation that during this time Cushites worked in Egypt, not only as slaves, but also as soldiers, merchants, magicians,²¹ civil servants, and nobility.²² Because of the large number of Cushites in Egypt at this time, it is almost certain that “a mixed multitude” of foreigners in Egypt would include Cushites. Whether this crowd included only former slaves and laborers, or whether it included a broader range of people, there is strong evidence that Cushites were included in the group.

limited to historical annals. Cushites appear frequently in Egyptian monumental art as well. Likewise other genres of ancient Egyptian literature mention Cushite slaves. For example, a love poem entitled “Seven Wishes” from the *Cairo Love Songs* (1305–1150 BC) reads, “Would that I were her Nubian [Cushite] slave, her servant in secret.” M. V. Fox, “Cairo Love Songs,” in *The Context of Scripture*, eds. W. W. Hallo and K. L. Younger (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 1.50; and B. H. Fowler, *Love Lyrics of Ancient Egypt* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994) 39.

²⁰Bresciani, “Foreigners,” 230.

²¹Magicians are of particular interest to us because of the important role they play in Exodus 7–8. Cushite magicians had a special reputation in Egypt. These Cushite magicians were famous for their power and there were many of them functioning in Egypt (Bresciani, “Foreigners,” 232–33). There is a strong possibility that some of the “magicians” who confronted Moses in Exodus 7 and 8 were Cushites. The phrase translated “Egyptian magicians” (Exod 7:11, NIV) literally means “magicians of the Egyptians.” The phrase gives no indication of nationality. There are two other points of interest regarding these magicians. First, note that they are the first ones to acknowledge that Moses has divine power, declaring to Pharaoh in Exod 8:19, “This is the finger of God.” It is therefore probable that these magicians are included in the term “officials” when used in Exod 9:20, which states “Those officials of Pharaoh who feared the word of the LORD hurried to bring their slaves and their livestock inside.” Do some of these people join the Israelite exodus as part of the “mixed crowd” in Exod 12:38? The other point of interest is that these “magicians” were also priests. “Magic” and priestly activity cannot be separated. The Hebrew word used for “magician” in Exodus derives from an Egyptian word that refers clearly to a class of priests that studied theology and manipulated spiritual powers. See Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 322; Sergio Pernigotti, “Priest,” in *The Egyptians*, ed. Sergio Donadoni (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997) 140; J. F. Borghouts, “Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt,” in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. Jack M. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000) 1775–76; and R. R. Ritner, “Magic” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald B. Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 2:323. While the connection is purely speculative, it is interesting to note the high probability of a Cushite presence among these priests and then the emergence of a central Israelite priest, Phinehas, whose name means “the Negro” or “the Cushite.”

²²D. O’Connor, *Ancient Nubia: Egypt’s Rival in Africa* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993) 61–64; Bresciani, “Foreigners,” 221–53; Leahy, “Ethnic Diversity,” 225–34.

Brueggemann is quite correct in saying that “earliest Israel was not an ethnic community.”²³ Included with the biological descendants of Jacob were other Semitic peoples (probably Arameans, Amorites, Canaanites, etc.) as well as black Africans from Cush.

III. THE SOJOURNER AND THE FOREIGNER

Exodus 12:31–39 describes the actual departure from Egypt (the Exodus) of the newly formed Israel. As mentioned above, participating in the Exodus is also “the mixed crowd,” that is, people of other ethnic groups. To commemorate the Exodus event Yahweh inaugurates the Passover, and Exod 12:40–49 describes this ritual. The particular focus of this text regarding the Passover meal is the distinction between those who can and those who can’t participate in the meal. This text appears to be placed here specifically to address the presence of foreigners within Israel as described a few verses earlier in 12:38 and as discussed above. Exodus 12:40–49 uses two distinctive terms to describe non-Israelites in regard to the Passover. These two terms are used frequently throughout the Torah with the same basic distinctions. The *gērîm*, usually translated as “sojourners,” or “aliens” are those from other groups who have accepted the worship of Yahweh. The other group, the *nokrîm*, usually translated “foreigners,” are the ones who have not accepted Yahweh.²⁴ The other implied distinction is that the *gērîm* (sojourners) have actually settled among the Israelites and are in the process of being assimilated while the *nokrîm* have not.²⁵ The critical issue is circumcision. Once the *gērîm* have been circumcised they can participate in the Passover (Exod 12:48). In fact, Exod 12:49 reads, “The same law applies to the native-born and to the alien (*gērîm*) living among you.” The *gērîm* are thus equal to the Israelites in religious aspects.²⁶ This is reflected fairly consistently throughout the Torah.

Theologically, participation in both the Exodus and the Passover meal by people of the “mixed crowd” is highly significant. The Exodus is the paradigmatic picture of salvation in the OT and the Passover is the central ritual memorializing this critical event.²⁷ The Exodus and the Passover of the OT are paralleled by the Cross and the Lord’s Supper in the NT. Thus the Exodus event and the Passover celebration of Exodus 12 are highly significant theologically. The presence of other “peoples” or “nationalities” at this juncture of the story has strong implications as to the nature of “true

²³Brueggemann, “Exodus,” 781.

²⁴B. Lang, “*nkr*,” *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, IX: 423–31.

²⁵R. Martin-Achard, “*gür*,” *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, eds. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997) 1:308.

²⁶Ibid., 309. Martin-Archard also points out that the LXX regularly translates this Hebrew term with the Greek word *prosēlytos*, a technical term implying that one has identified himself with Judaism through the initiatory act of circumcision.

²⁷Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 212–14.

Israel.” It also suggests a partial fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3, “and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” (NRSV). Finally, Exod 12:43–49 indicates that participation in the celebration of Yahweh’s great redemptive act was not based on birth or ethnicity, but rather on relationship to Yahweh and his covenant.

IV. THE INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE OF MOSES

The two main characters in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy are Yahweh (the LORD) and Moses. From the human side, Moses dominates the story. He is Yahweh’s appointed leader, the lawgiver, and the great mediator between Israel and their God. As central figures in the OT, only Abraham and David can compare to Moses.

Surprisingly, the Torah presents a significant amount of material that deals with Moses’ personal life, particularly in regard to the two women that he marries.²⁸ It is important to remember that narrative texts, whether in the Torah or in other Scripture, convey theology just as powerfully as any other genre.²⁹ It is not merely the legal material in the Torah that teaches theology. So the marriages of Moses—or perhaps we should say the *intermarriages* of Moses—have something to say to us theologically.

In Exod 2:15–22 Moses meets and marries a Midianite woman named Zipporah. The Midianites were a Semitic-speaking people, ethnic cousins of the Israelites. What is shocking about the marriage is not the ethnicity of the bride but rather the fact that her father Reuel is a priest of Midian. Numbers 25 indicates that the Midianites worshipped Baal and not Yahweh. Moses apparently marries into a Baal worshipping priestly family!

It is critical to place this event into the narrative context. In Exodus 2 Moses murders an Egyptian and then flees to Midian, presumably to hide from Pharaoh. At this point Moses has not yet encountered God nor has he received his dramatic call from God. He is running away from Egypt and from his people; his marriage to Zipporah is part of his escape. Placed within this context, this marriage is not necessarily a positive event in his life. There is no indication that God approves of it. Exodus 18:2 indicates that after God calls him and he returns to Egypt to free the Israelites, Moses “sends her (Zipporah) away” back to her family. In Exodus 18, Zipporah’s relative Jethro brings her back to Moses in the camp of the Israelites and he apparently accepts her. However, note the shift in context. She now joins Moses and the nation of Israel, who worship Yahweh, rather than Moses

²⁸See the detailed discussion of Moses’ two marriages in Hays, “Moses,” 16–26, 60–62.

²⁹See the development of this view in Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000) 1–15.

joining her and her family who worship Baal. This theological transition is important.³⁰

Ironically, not long after the events of Exodus 18 the Midianites will appear as a deadly and dangerous enemy of Israel. In Numbers 25 Midianite women allure Israelite men into promiscuity and the worship of Baal. This act threatens the very existence of Israel and challenges the heart of their relationship with Yahweh. Only by responding severely to those who posed this threat was total disaster to Israel averted. Indeed, one of the last public acts of Moses is to completely destroy the Midianites (Numbers 31). This is hardly a picture of a blissful relationship with one's in-laws. In summary, Moses' entire relationship with Zipporah and her priestly Midianite family appears somewhat questionable. His marriage to Zipporah does not occur while he is walking closely in obedience to God and thus it does not appear to serve as any type of positive model for us. Indeed, as discussed below, the dangers of marrying outside the faith will be underscored throughout the Torah and the entire OT.

Another wife, however, is introduced in Num 12:1, which reads: "Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife for he had married a Cushite." Who is this woman? What is the significance of stating that she is a Cushite?

As mentioned earlier, Cush is a fairly common term in Egyptian literature. It also appears over fifty times in the OT, and is attested in Assyrian literature as well. It is used regularly to refer to the area south of Egypt, above the cataracts on the Nile, where a black African civilization flourished for over 2000 years.³¹ Thus it is quite clear that Moses marries a black African woman.

Several older commentators, however, argue that this woman was not a black Cushite from the country south of Egypt, but rather an Arabic-looking Midianite (Zipporah). Martin Noth, for example, presents the standard argument by citing Hab 3:7, where the term "Cushan" is used in parallel with Midian. From this reference in Habakkuk, Noth (and others) conclude that there was a group in Arabia known as Cushites that were related to or identical to the Midianites. Several writers also conclude that since this is a reference to Midianites, the woman in question must be Zipporah. Noth criticizes Luther's translation of "Cushite" as "negress," stating that this usage of Cushite cannot possibly refer to the region south of Egypt because that area is too far removed from Moses' activity.³²

However, Noth's arguments are weak and outdated, reflecting a very limited understanding of the situation in Egypt. During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties of Egypt, relations between Egypt and Cush were

³⁰ For a detailed discussion on this passage, including an explanation of Zipporah's relationship to Jethro, see Hays, "Moses," 18–26.

³¹ Hays, "The Cushites," 270–80.

³² Martin Noth, *Numbers: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968) 98.

extremely close. Cush was under direct Egyptian control; indeed, it was practically part of Egypt. There were thousands of Cushites in Egypt at all levels of society. If Moses was born and raised in Egypt, it is not only possible, but almost certain, that he would have known numerous Cushites in his youth. Noth's statement that the African Cushites were too far removed from Moses' activity reflects a serious misunderstanding on Noth's part regarding the extent to which Cushites permeated Egyptian society.³³ Furthermore, as discussed earlier in this article, Exod 12:38 states that "many other people" came out of Egypt with the sons of Israel. The implication is, of course, that these were other nationalities, reflecting the ethnic makeup of Egypt. It is very likely that there were Cushites in this group as well. So, the Cushite woman of Num 12:1 could have been either one that Moses knew in his youth or one that he met as the Exodus began.³⁴

The argument from Hab 3:7 does nothing to alter the normal meaning of the term "Cush." Many commentators, including Noth, begin their discussion by acknowledging that Cush usually refers to the region south of Egypt. But, they claim, Numbers 12 is an exception, as Hab 3:7 supposedly demonstrates. However, the text in Hab 3:7 does not read "Cush" but rather "Cushan." "Cush" and "Cushan" are not necessarily the same word. Cush occurs dozens of times in the OT, clearly as a reference to the civilization south of Egypt. "Cushan" occurs only once, in Hab 3:7, and the reference is somewhat enigmatic.³⁵ There is little evidence in the literature of the Ancient Near East outside of the supposed connection in Hab 3:7 of any Midianite-related group referred to as Cushites.³⁶ There should be overwhelming evidence before a common, normal usage of a word is rejected in favor of a poorly attested usage. Furthermore, throughout the OT the term "Cush" is associated closely with Egypt. In a narrative text of a story relating to the Exodus from Egypt, why should one go to the word 'Cushan' in Habakkuk for their understanding of the term "Cush" in Numbers? Also note that early translations such as the Septuagint and the Vulgate translate the term "Cushite" in Num 12:1 as "Ethiopian," the term

³³For a discussion on the relationship between Egypt and Cush see Hays, "The Cushites," 275–77; and Donald B. Redford, *From Slave to Pharaoh: The Black Experience of Ancient Egypt* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

³⁴Edwin Yamauchi writes, "In light of the fact the ample Egyptian evidence of the presence of many Nubians in Egypt from as early as the Old Kingdom and of intermarriage between Egyptians and Nubians, we should not doubt the possibility of Moses' marriage to a Kushite or Nubian woman" (*Africa and the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004] 75).

³⁵The term "Cushan" does occur in a compound form as the name "Cushan-Rishathaim" (Judg 3:7–11). This usage appears to be unrelated to the term in Hab 3:7. See David W. Baker, "Cushan," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1220.

³⁶The best-documented defense for such a group is by R. D. Haak, "Cush in Zephaniah," in *The Pitcher is Broken: Memorial Essays for Gösta W. Ahlström*, JSOTSS 190, eds. S. W. Holloway and L. K. Handy (Sheffield: Sheffield Press, 1995), but his evidence is not convincing.

used by the Greeks and Romans to refer to the region south of Egypt inhabited by people with black skin.

Another point to be considered is the observation that Reuel, the father-in-law of Moses from his Midianite wife Zipporah, is mentioned two chapters earlier in Num 10:29–32, where he is specifically called a “Midianite.” Why should the narrator of Numbers change terms between Numbers 10 and Numbers 12? If the reference in 12:1 is to Zipporah, why is her father called a Midianite in Numbers 10, yet she is called a Cushite in Numbers 12?

Yet what has become of Zipporah? Perhaps she has died and this text refers to Moses’ second marriage. This is unlikely, however, because only a short time elapses in the story between the appearance of Zipporah in Exodus 18 and the mention of the Cushite wife in Numbers 12. Of course, at this time in the ancient world it would not be unreasonable for Moses to have more than one wife. The Cushite woman may be a second wife. More likely is the possibility that Moses marries the Cushite woman after he sends Zipporah away, but before Jethro brings her back.³⁷ At any rate, the Numbers text implies that this is a recent marriage, and that this marriage is the reason for the hostility from Miriam and Aaron.³⁸

The term “Cushite” is repeated twice in Num 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. Jeremiah, for example, refers to the unique skin of the Cushites without any explanation of who they were or where they lived (“Can the Cushite change his skin?” Jer 13:23). This implies that Jeremiah’s audience was familiar with the term “Cushite” and the uniqueness of their skin color. The ethnicity of Moses’ new wife is stressed and then opposition arises within his family. The most logical explanation is to associate these two as cause and effect.³⁹

³⁷Baruch A. Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993) 328.

³⁸See the good discussion on this text by David T. Adamo, “The African Wife of Moses: An Examination of Numbers 12:1–9,” *Africa Theological Journal* 18 (1989): 230–37.

³⁹Snowden, however, argues that interracial marriage between blacks and other ethnic groups, especially Egyptians, was not all that unusual. Frank M. Snowden, *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970) 192–93. He cites Herodotus 2.30 and Plutarch *De exilio* 601 E, who refer to an event in the reign of the Egyptian king Psammetichus I when 240,000 rebellious Egyptian men moved south, settled, and intermarried with the Cushites (called Ethiopians by these Greek writers). In a later work Snowden states that there was an unknown prince of a royal family in Egypt with a Negro wife. Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983) 95. Snowden cites B. G. Haycock, “Landmarks in Cushite History,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 53 (1972): 230, 237. Citing S. Wenig, *The Woman in Egyptian Art* (Leipzig: Leipzig, 1969) 50, Snowden also argues that the physical features of queen Tiy, the wife of

There are also numerous non-biblical ancient texts and traditions which connect Moses with Cush (Ethiopia). Josephus, for example, in *Antiquities of the Jews*, X, relates an incredible, non-biblical story wherein Moses leads an army of Egyptians and Hebrews against the Cushites to deliver Egypt from a Cushite invasion. While Moses is defeating the Cushites, Tharbis, the daughter of the Cushite king, falls in love with him and proposes marriage. Moses accepts and marries Tharbis, a marriage that concludes the successful campaign and seals a treaty with the Cushites. This is one of the most extensive accounts of an “addition” to the biblical text by Josephus. Runnalls writes that this episode indicates rather clearly that Josephus understood the Cushite of Num 12:1 to be from the Cush south of Egypt.⁴⁰

Earlier than Josephus is Artapanus, probably an Alexandrian Jew writing in the second century BC. Artapanus describes the military expedition by Moses to Cush but he does not mention the marriage.⁴¹ Later Jewish legends continued to expound on Moses’ escapades in Cush. In several of these legends Moses marries a Cushite (Ethiopian) princess named Adoniah.⁴²

Without the ethnicity issue it is difficult to associate Num 12:1 with the rest of the passage. Indeed, many source critics dismiss the verse as a later insertion, thus waving the problem away.⁴³ This approach, however, merely

Amenophis III, indicate that she was a Cushite (Snowden calls her Nubian). Donna - Runnalls states that the Egyptian pharaohs frequently took Cushite (Nubian) wives to provide legitimacy for ruling Cush (“Moses’ Egyptian Campaign,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic and Roman Periods* 14 [1983]: 135–56). Also documenting numerous instances of interracial marriage between Egyptians and Cushites (Nubians) is Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible*, 73–75.

⁴⁰Runnalls, “Moses’ Egyptian Campaign,” 148. William Whiston, trans., *Josephus: Complete Works* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1960) 58, notes that Irenæus cites this story from Josephus. Whiston also suggests that this episode might be behind the statement of Stephen in Acts 7:22. Stephen is quoted as referring to Moses as “powerful in speech and action” before God called him to deliver the Israelites. For a discussion of the Jewish literary background for Stephen’s statement see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992) 125–26. Another interesting observation is that made by P. Montet, who notes that the Cushites (Ethiopians) are mentioned in Egyptian texts recounting stories of magic power, especially in competition with the Egyptian magicians (*Egypt and the Bible* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1968] 92). The similarities between this and Moses’ encounter with the magicians are perhaps suggestive.

⁴¹This account is cited by Eusebius, *Præparatio Evangelica*, IX, 27, who copied the story from Alexander Polyhistor, who apparently obtained the account by Artapanus. The differences between Artapanus and Josephus are puzzling. Numerous scholarly discussions on Josephus’s probable sources have been written. See Runnalls, “Moses’ Egyptian Campaign,” 135–56.

⁴²This account is presented in the spurious *Book of Jasher*, 23.5–25.5. See also L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Bible* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1956) 299–302; and D. M. Beegle, “Moses,” *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 4:917.

⁴³See G. B. Gray, *Numbers*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 121–22. In his discussion, however, Gray does cite Dillmann, who

begs the question. *Someone* associated Moses' marriage to a Cushite with the opposition from Miriam and they constructed the text in this manner. Throughout the entire time period suggested for the composition of the Hebrew Bible, the term "Cush" would have been understood to refer to the black inhabitants of the civilization south of Egypt. In the Numbers 12 narrative, the result of the conflict over Moses' marriage is that Miriam is judged and Moses is reaffirmed. Apparently his family (Miriam and Aaron) objects to this interracial marriage, but Yahweh approves. In fact, Yahweh's punishment on Miriam is swift and severe. He strikes her with a skin disease and she becomes (white) as snow. Cross suggests that the punishment of white, leprous skin was an intentional, appropriate response to Miriam's prejudice against the black wife.⁴⁴

However, it is difficult to be certain about Miriam's motives behind her opposition. The text implies that she and Aaron are caught up in some type of power struggle. Perhaps she is merely jealous that Moses would add another person, especially another woman, into their small circle of power. However, there is another, perhaps more plausible, explanation, based on the Egyptian customs of that era. During the Egyptian New Kingdom Period, and especially during the Eighteenth Dynasty (1570–1305 BC), the pharaohs of Egypt frequently married foreigners, but they also frequently married their sisters.⁴⁵ Miriam may well envision the leadership of Moses according to the model provided by the pharaohs of the Eighteenth Dynasty. As such, she may be incensed that Moses has chosen a foreign wife instead of her. Although the biblical commentators on Numbers never discuss this option, the Egyptian custom is clearly documented and this documentation clearly matches this particular time era. It should at least be listed as a viable option for the motive behind Miriam's opposition.

More important, and much clearer, is the theological dimension of Miriam's punishment. She was sent outside the camp, a temporary expulsion from the family and the people of God. While the Cushite woman becomes part of Moses' family and the people of Israel through marriage,

"considers that the Cushite offended Miriam not because she was a foreigner, but because she was black."

⁴⁴Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1973) 204, is cited by Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1984) 137. Also suggesting this view is Cain Hope Felder, *Troubling Biblical Waters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989) 42. Note also the narrative context of Numbers 11, where the nation is grumbling against Moses. Perhaps Moses turned to this Cushite woman for support and consolation in the midst of this difficult time for him. It is noteworthy, however, that at a time when the nation as a whole is hostile to the man of God that it is a Cushite that appears to be sympathetic. This theme will recur several times.

⁴⁵T. Wilfong, "Marriage and Divorce," in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Donald Redford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 343; J. Černý, "Consanguineous Marriages in Pharaonic Egypt," *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 40 (1954): 23–29.

Miriam, through her opposition to Moses, is separated both from the family and the people of Israel.⁴⁶

Therefore, the case is extremely strong that Moses married a black Cushite woman from the Cushite civilization south of Egypt. This understanding not only fits with the details of the biblical text, but it also fits the historical picture of Cushites in Egypt at that time and with the way the text was translated and understood by the ancient writers.⁴⁷

The theological implications of Num 12:1 are significant. Moses is not a minor, backwater biblical character. He is a gigantic character in the biblical story and one of the central servants of God in the Bible. This event occurs, not while he is running away from God or while he is disobeying God, but while he is obviously walking close with God.⁴⁸ In fact, God points this out to Miriam and Aaron very forcefully by stating,

Listen to my words:
When a prophet of the LORD is among you,
I reveal myself to him in visions,
I speak to him in dreams.
But this is not true of my servant Moses;
he is faithful in all my house.
With him I speak face to face,
clearly and not in riddles;
he sees the form of the LORD.

⁴⁶This underscores the fact that the critical element in both of Moses' marriages appears to be how the marriage affects the relationship between Moses and Israel, the people of Yahweh. The Midianite marriage pulls Moses away from Yahweh and from the people of Israel and into the family of a Midianite priest. Moses is forced to annul (he sends her away) this marriage until Jethro acknowledges Yahweh and brings Zipporah into the camp of the Israelites. In essence, she becomes one of them. The destruction of the Midianites at the end of Numbers highlights the fact that Moses no longer has a valid marriage/treaty relationship with them. The Cushite woman, on the other hand, appears to be already in the Israelite camp, in essence already part of Israel. She is probably part of the "mixed multitude" that came out of Egypt with Israel. Moses does not become a pagan Cushite by marrying her. Rather she becomes a Yahweh-fearing Israelite by marrying him. To Yahweh this makes all the difference.

⁴⁷This is also the conclusion of Levine, *Numbers 1–20*, 328.

⁴⁸This is an important factor in determining whether a character in the narrative is functioning as a positive model for the readers or as a negative model. Likewise, the commentary by the narrator or by God in the narrative serves to assist us in determining whether the story should serve as paradigmatic. On methodology relating to the development of theology from OT narrative see J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word: A Hands-on Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005) 305–327. For further discussion on interpreting narrative theologically (i.e. ethically), see Wenham, *Story as Torah*; and Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

Why then were you not afraid
to speak against my servant Moses? (Num 12:6–8, NIV)

Miriam and Aaron had spoken against Moses because of this marriage, and after the lecture above, God’s anger burns against them (12:9) and he strikes Miriam with a “skin disease.” It is only due to the intervention of Moses (12:13) that God cuts the judgment short. Clearly God affirms Moses’ marriage to this black woman.

V. OLD TESTAMENT INJUNCTIONS AGAINST INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

Yet what of the OT injunctions *against* intermarriage? Has Moses violated these injunctions? Does the biblical text suggest two different approaches to intermarriage between the sons of Israel and foreigners? Not at all. First, observe that in the Torah the prohibition against intermarriage is always strictly in regard to the inhabitants of Canaan and not to foreigners in general. Second, the reason given for this prohibition is always theological—the inhabitants worship other gods and intermarrying with them would inevitably lead to the apostasy of God’s people. The central text is Deut 7:1–4, which reads,

When the LORD your God brings you into the land you are entering to possess and drive out before you many nations—the Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites, seven nations larger and stronger than you—and when the LORD your God has delivered them over to you and you have defeated them, then you must destroy them totally. Make no treaty with them, and show them no mercy. Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD's anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you. (Deut 7:1–4, NIV)

The command is for the Israelites to drive out and destroy the current inhabitants of the land and to refrain from intermarrying with them. The reason: if you marry them, “they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods.” The same warning with the same reasons is stated in Exod 34:15–16 and in Josh 23:12.

Underscoring this distinction is Deut 21:10–14. In Deuteronomy 20 God tells the Israelites that they must completely destroy all of the cities and all of the people in the land they were invading. However, cities and people outside of the land fell into a different category. Deuteronomy 20 explains that the Israelites were to make an offer of peace to these people, and that, even if peace is refused, they were not to kill the women and children in these foreign cities. Following up on this explanation, Deut 21:10–14

explains the procedure for taking these *foreign* captured women as wives. Thus in this case, i.e. in conquests outside the Promised Land, intermarriage with foreigners was clearly permitted.⁴⁹

The limitation of the ban on intermarriage to apply only to the inhabitants of Canaan is consistent for early Israel. Furthermore the reason—a theological one—is always clearly stated. This reason has absolutely nothing to do with race or physical appearance. Note that Israel is specifically forbidden to intermarry with the Canaanites and other inhabitants of Canaan, who are the very people most closely related to them ethnically. They are allowed to intermarry with other foreigners as Deut 21:10–14 and Num 12:1 illustrate. The foreigners that they are allowed to marry are much more racially different than those whom they are prohibited from marrying. Obviously, the issue is not racial difference, but faith and theology.

Judges 3:5–6 chronicles the sad reality that after Israel settles in the land they forget this prohibition, intermarry with the original inhabitants, and promptly begin to worship the gods of the other people. The story of Ruth bucks the trend, demonstrating that foreigners who profess faith in Yahweh can intermarry with Israel and be blessed.⁵⁰ Solomon, however, dramatically illustrates the danger of foreign intermarriage when the foreign partners are not worshippers of Yahweh. First Kings 11:4–6 stresses the connection between his faithlessness to Yahweh and his marriage to foreign, pagan women. Ultimately, as the texts in Deuteronomy and Joshua predict, this phenomenon will bring Yahweh’s judgment and will send Israel out of the land and into exile.⁵¹

Thus after the judgmental exile, when Israel returns to the land during the post-exilic era, it is no surprise that Ezra and Nehemiah both react vigorously when they discover that the Jews of the return are marrying foreigners (and non-foreigners?) who are not faithful worshippers of Yahweh.⁵² They both connect their current situation with the disaster that

⁴⁹C. Hayes, “Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources,” *Harvard Theological Review* 92 (1999): 36. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 1584–85, notes that Leviticus 18 and 20 focuses explicitly on sexual misconduct and resulting impurity. It is strange, he notes, that there is no prohibition in these two chapters against interracial marriage. He concludes: “The answer, I submit, can be found only by facing the fact that there is no absolute ban against intermarriage in preexilic times.”

⁵⁰Rahab probably also falls in this category, even though she is apparently a Canaanite. Both Ruth and Rahab, obvious foreigners, are included in the genealogy of David.

⁵¹Gary N. Knoppers writes, “According to the Deuteronomist, mixed marriages were the means by which the Israelites forgot their god and began worshipping other gods” (“Sex, Religion, and Politics: The Deuteronomist on Intermarriage,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 14 [1994]: 132).

⁵²For a discussion on the identity of these wives, see A. Philip Brown, “The Problem of Mixed Marriages in Ezra 9–10,” *BSac* 162 (Oct–Dec 2005): 439–49.

resulted from earlier violations of this prohibition. Thus the situation in Ezra 9:1 is cast against the prohibitions of Deuteronomy and Joshua while the issue in Neh 13:23–27 is presented in light of the disaster that resulted from Solomon’s marital experience. Both Ezra and Nehemiah seem to be saying that earlier intermarriages in Israel’s history led to the apostasy that resulted in the exile.⁵³ To them it is abhorrent that Israel is falling into the same pattern again. But both Ezra and Nehemiah cast the danger of intermarriage with foreigners as one of apostasy driven by the pagan beliefs of the foreign spouse.⁵⁴ Ethnic or racial issues, other than religion, are not at all related to the prohibition.⁵⁵

⁵³Ibid., 137.

⁵⁴Malachi 2:10–16 reflects a similar situation. If Malachi’s words are to be understood literally (and the majority of commentators seem to lean this way) then the Jews of the return were guilty, not only of intermarrying with pagan, foreign women, but also of divorcing their own Jewish wives in order to do so. See the overview and discussion by Ralph Smith (*Micah-Malachi*, Word Biblical Commentary [Waco: Word, 1984] 318–25), who favors the literal view; and B. Glazier-McDonald, “Intermarriage, Divorce, and the *BAT-’ĒL NĒKĀR*: Insights into Mal 2:10–16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106/4 (1987): 603–611, who argues for a combination of a literal view (foreign wives) and a figurative view (apostasy). Puzzling, perhaps, is Malachi’s statement of Yahweh’s disdain for divorce when placed in the context of Ezra’s command ordering the Israelites to divorce the foreign wives.

⁵⁵This point is stressed by numerous scholars. Mark A. Throntveit writes, “It is not their racial or national ties that are at issue but the religious practices that the foreign wives brought to their marriages and the effects those practices would surely have had upon family and community structures” (*Ezra-Nehemiah*, Interpretation [Louisville: John Knox, 1992], 57). Ralph W. Klein states “marriages outside the community were *prima facie* evidence of faithlessness” (“The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 3, ed. Leander E. Keck [Nashville: Abingdon, 1999] 7330). F. Charles Fensham argues, “The influence of a foreign mother, with her connection to another religion, on her children would ruin the pure religion of the Lord and would create a syncretistic religion contrary to everything in the Jewish faith” (*The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982] 124). A. Philip Brown (“Problem of Mixed Marriages,” 449–50) writes, “It was not intermarriage with foreigners as such that caused Ezra such consternation, but with foreigners who, whether syncretistic or pagan, were idolators. . . . From Ezra’s vantage point the problem was entirely spiritual in nature. The terms he used to describe it underscore the essentially spiritual nature of the problem.” See also H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1985) 130–31. Gordon F. Davies suggests that Ezra never intended this as a permanent injunction (*Ezra & Nehemiah*, Berit Olam [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1999] 58). However, as Judaism developed in the Second Temple period the tendency was to downplay or ignore the allowable foreign marriage element evident in the Torah and to stress a firm, universal application of Ezra’s prohibition. Thus the books of *Jubilees* and 4QMMT (from Qumran), as well as later rabbinic writings, all stressed a strict prohibition against marriage of any Jew to any Gentile. For a discussion of this development and the socio-theological reasons behind it see L. Epstein, *Marriage*

VI. THE GENEALOGY OF JESUS

Matthew starts off his gospel by connecting Jesus to a long genealogy stretching back to Abraham (Matt 1:2–17). Without a doubt Matthew is presenting Jesus as the continuation, even the fulfillment, of the OT story. Keener, however, points out that Matthew is also introducing Jesus' historical connection to and "inseparability" from the Gentile mission.⁵⁶ Matthew does this by listing four women with strong Gentile connections in Jesus' genealogy (Tamar of Canaan, Rahab of Jericho, Ruth the Moabitess, and the ex-wife of Uriah the Hittite). These four women come as quite a surprise in the genealogy. First, Jewish genealogies usually only track men, so it is unusual to find women in such a list. Second, if some women were to be listed in the list of prominent OT characters, one would expect to find the famous matriarchs (Sarah, Rebekah, etc.). Third, at this time period Jewish genealogies usually were used to establish the purity of their lineage. Yet, Matthew seems to intentionally stress the mixed racial nature of Jesus' lineage.⁵⁷ Keener argues that these women are not cited randomly or in isolation, but as part of Matthew's larger theme of Gentile inclusion. Keener connects this text to the issue of interracial marriages by concluding, "For Matthew, godly interracial marriages are the signs of ethnic reconciliation and the church's mission to reconcile representatives of all nations under Christ's Lordship."⁵⁸

VII. CONCLUSIONS

So what theological conclusions should we draw? *I would suggest that interracial intermarriage is strongly affirmed by Scripture.* Marrying unbelievers, on the other hand, is strongly prohibited. The criteria for approving or disapproving of our children's selected spouses should be based on their faith in Christ and not at all on the color of their skin. This theological affirmation should have profound implications for the church today. White families frequently rise up in arms when their children want to marry blacks, regardless of how strong their Christian faith is. On the other hand, white Christian young adults can marry other whites with little opposition even if the faith of their selected mate is virtually non-existent. Such behavior reflects the church's weak theological understanding of Scripture on this subject.

Laws in the Bible and Talmud (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942) 145–77; and Hayes, "Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources," 3–36.

⁵⁶Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 73.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 80.

⁵⁸Craig S. Keener, "The Bible and Interracial Marriage," in *Just Don't Marry One: Interracial Dating, Marriage, and Parenting*, ed. George A. Yancey and Sherelyn Wittum Yancey (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2002) 6.

Furthermore, the common cultural ban on intermarriage lies at the heart of the racial division in the church. White Christians who say that they are not prejudiced but who vehemently oppose interracial marriages are not being honest. They are still prejudiced, and I would suggest that they are out of line with the biblical teaching on this subject. In addition, this theology applies not only to black/white interracial marriages, but equally to intermarriages between any two ethnic groups within the church throughout the world, especially in those regions where the church has inherited strong interracial animosities from the culture at large.

The theology derived from the marriage of Moses to a black woman corresponds well with the rest of biblical theology. Genesis 1 taught us that all people are created in the image of God and have equal status before God. Paul tells us in the NT that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile but that *all* Christians are brothers and sisters in the family of God. Marrying outside the family is forbidden, but the clear biblical definition of family is based on faith in Christ and not on race or descent. Interracial marriage between Christians is clearly supported by Scripture.