MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism · Christianity · Islam

DOCUMENT 397

From Beyond the Rivers of Cush

A Covenant Deep Dive into Yahweh's Covenant and the African Peoples: *Cush (Kush)*, *Egypt (Mitsrayim)*, and *Put (Put)* in the Written Tanakh

Are the Peoples of Africa Inside Yahweh's Covenant, Was Africa Ever Cursed, and What Did the Prophets Promise to Cush and Egypt? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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Elder Kepha Arcemont, Founder

miqdashbethel.ai • miqdashbethel@gmail.com

The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

✡ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
The written Torah names Cush, Egypt, and Put among the sons of Noah (**Genesis 10:6**) and commands, ***"You shall not abhor an Egyptian"*** (**Deuteronomy 23:7 [Hebrew 23:8]**). In 1973 Israel's Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef, ruled that the Beta Israel of Ethiopia are Jews, and most of that community has since settled in Israel. Rabbinic literature also preserves a later tale that Ham was struck in his skin (Talmud Sanhedrin 108b), which the written Torah does not contain.	The New Testament tells of an Ethiopian official of the queen of the Ethiopians who was reading **Isaiah 53** on the road home and was baptized (Acts 8:27–38), and the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches are among the oldest in the world. Yet European Christian writers turned the ***"curse of Ham"*** into a defense of slavery and colonial rule (Doc 223). Here the Tanakh is heard first.	The first emigration of Muslims, about 615 CE, went to the Christian king of Abyssinia, who sheltered them, and Bilal ibn Rabah, an Abyssinian, was the first to give the call to prayer. The Qur'an counts ***"the diversity of your tongues and your colors"*** among the signs of Allah (Q. 30:22). Islam honors Hajar, the mother of Ismail, whom the Torah calls Hagar the Egyptian (**Genesis 16:1**).

DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur'an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh**'s own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**'s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document asks one question of the written Tanakh: what covenant **Yahweh** made with the African peoples the text names, Cush, Egypt, and Put, and what He promised them. It is the library edition of a paper prepared for the East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion (Nairobi, Kenya); the journal edition follows that journal's academic format, and this edition carries the same research in the Doc 250 format. **Yahweh** (**יהוה**) and **Elohim** (**אֱלֹהִים**) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books and personal names are given in English. Every Hebrew word is given with its English meaning, English first, and both appear together in bold italic at every occurrence; anything in quotation marks is set in bold italic. Scripture references are bold; Strong's numbers are plain and given for reference only. No lexicon is cited in this document: the meaning of each name is taken from its usage in the Tanakh. Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew; where a verse is quoted with its Hebrew text, the Hebrew line comes first and the English verse follows in gold. **Verse numbers follow the English version. In a few chapters the Hebrew Bible divides the chapter at a different point, so the same verse carries a different number in the Hebrew text. Where that happens, the Hebrew number is given in brackets on first citation, for example**

Numbers 30:13 [Hebrew 30:14]. Findings are graded Corroborated (two or more independent Tanakh witnesses), Single witness, or Not in the text. Modern scholars are cited by name and year as historical witnesses to how these texts have been read, never as doctrinal authority; their works are listed in the Comparative Texts table.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The covenant with Noah; the Table of Nations; the curse of Canaan; Abraham's blessing; Hagar; Joseph and Asenath; the mixed multitude; the Cushite wife of Moses; one law for native and stranger; the Egyptian not abhorred; the two-witness standard
Nevi'im (Prophets)	2 Samuel, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Malachi	The Cushite messenger; Tirhakah; Ebed-melech; Egypt called ***"My people"***; worshipers from beyond Cush; one standard of judgment; one father of all
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Esther, Daniel, 2 Chronicles	Cush stretching out her hands; Cush born in Zion; Cush at the edge of the known world; Libyans and Cushites in Judah's history

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Rabbinic literature	Talmud Sanhedrin 108b	The later tale of Ham's skin, absent from the written Torah
New Testament	Acts 8:27–38	The Ethiopian official reading Isaiah
Qur'an and Islamic history	Q. 30:22; the first emigration to Abyssinia (Ibn Ishaq, *Sirat Rasul Allah*)	Islam on color; Abyssinia as refuge

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Modern scholarship on Cush and Africa	Rodney S. Sadler Jr., *Can a Cushite Change His Skin?* (T&T Clark, 2005); David T. Adamo, *In die Skriflig* 52:1 (2018) and 53:1 (2019); Knut Holter, ***Yahweh** in Africa* (Peter Lang, 2000), *Old Testament Essays* 21:2 (2008) and 24:2 (2011); Marta Høyland Lavik, *Old Testament Essays* 34:2 (2021); Peter Unseth, *Africa Journal of Evangelical Theology* 18:2 (1999); Philip Lokel and Willie Van Heerden, *Old Testament Essays* 19:2 (2006); J. Daniel Hays, *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153 (1996); Mary Getui, Knut Holter, and Victor Zinkuratire, eds., *Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa* (Peter Lang, 2001); Aloo O. Mojola, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35:3 (2014)	How African and other scholars have read the Cush and Egypt texts
Modern scholarship on the curse of Ham	David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham* (Princeton, 2003); Edith R. Sanders, *The Journal of African History* 10:4 (1969); Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers* (Princeton, 2001)	How Genesis 9 was turned into a racial curse and the Hamitic hypothesis
African religion	John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Heinemann, 1969)	Belief in one Creator among African peoples
Hebrew text and translation	*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, 5th ed. (1997); JPS *Tanakh* (1985)	The text examined and the translation checked
Earlier library material	Docs 223, 246, 307	Built upon here; checked in Section VIII

I. THE QUESTION BEFORE US: AFRICA AND THE COVENANT

The Hebrew Bible, called the Tanakh in Jewish tradition and the Old Testament in Christian tradition, is read in Africa by more people today than at any time in its history. Its stories are preached in Kiswahili, Amharic, Luganda, Ekegusii, Arabic, and hundreds of other languages, and its laws and prophets shape the moral imagination of churches, mosques, and homes across the continent (Mojola, 2014). Yet the way many African communities first heard what this book says about Africa was not through its own words. It was through a commentary laid over it: the claim that Noah cursed Ham, that Ham was the father of the African peoples, and that dark skin and servitude were the marks of that curse. When the slave trade ended, the same story was turned around into the Hamitic hypothesis,

which taught that whatever was admirable in African history had been brought by a lighter-skinned ***"Hamitic"*** people from outside (Sanders, 1969). In East Africa that teaching shaped colonial accounts of the peoples of the Great Lakes, with consequences still felt in the region (Mamdani, 2001).

African biblical scholarship has answered this inheritance for more than half a century. Scholars such as David Tuesday Adamo have gathered the texts that speak of Cush and Egypt and argued that Africa and Africans were present in the Hebrew Bible from the beginning (Adamo, 2018). Knut Holter has traced how colonial interpreters portrayed the Cushites as ***"naturally"*** slaves, and how African readers have recovered a different picture (Holter, 2008, 2011). Rodney Sadler's word study of every occurrence of the root ***"Cush"*** found that the biblical writers held no coherent system of racial thought and often esteemed the Cushites (Sadler, 2005). A symposium held in Nairobi in 1999 brought East African and other scholars together to ask what it means to interpret the Old Testament in Africa today (Getui et al., 2001).

This article builds on that work with a narrower and more demanding question. It does not ask what later traditions, Jewish, Christian, or Islamic, have said about Africa. It asks what the covenant texts themselves say: what covenant **Yahweh**, the **Elohim** of Israel, makes with the peoples the text calls Cush, Mizraim, and Put; whether any of these peoples is excluded from it; where Africans appear inside the covenant story; and what the prophets promise them. The aim is a reading that a careful reader of any faith, or of none, can check line by line against the Hebrew text.

Elder Kepha prepared this study first as a paper for the East African Journal of Traditions, Culture and Religion, published by the East African Nature and Science Organization in Nairobi, Kenya. This library edition carries the same research in the Doc 250 format, with the Hebrew text, the graded findings, and the standing sections of every Miqdash Bethel document. It builds on Doc 307 (*Have We Not All One Father?*), which showed that the Tanakh classifies peoples by family, language, land, and nation and never by color, and on Doc 246 (*Cush Shall Stretch Out Her Hands*), which treated the Ethiopian Bible and the Cushite witness. Doc 223 (*Ships in the Middle Passage*) showed that **Genesis 9:25** curses Canaan, not Ham. This document does not repeat those studies. It takes up the covenant itself: what **Yahweh** promised and commanded concerning the African peoples, and what He foretold for them.

II. HOW THE TEXT WAS EXAMINED

The primary source is the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible as preserved in the Leningrad Codex and printed in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger & Rudolph, 1997). English renderings are the author's own literal working translations, checked against the Jewish Publication Society translation (Jewish Publication Society, 1985). Verse numbers follow the English versions; where the Hebrew

numbering differs, the Hebrew number is given in brackets, for example **Psalms 68:31 [Hebrew 68:32]**.

The corpus was gathered by locating every occurrence of the Hebrew names for the three African lands of the Table of Nations: ***Cush (Kush)*** and the gentilic ***Cushite (Kushi)***; ***Egypt (Mitsrayim)*** and ***Egyptian (Mitsri)***; and ***Put (Put)*** together with the related ***Libyans (Lubim)***. Texts were then sorted into five questions: the place of these peoples in the genealogy of nations; the curse of **Genesis 9:25**; individual Africans in the covenant narrative; the laws that govern the stranger; and the oracles of the prophets. Where the identification of a place is debated, as with Sheba or the Cushite wife of Moses, the debate is reported rather than settled by assumption (Unseth, 1999; Van Heerden, 2006).

Each finding was tested against a criterion drawn from the text itself. Deuteronomy requires that a matter be established ***"at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses"*** (**Deuteronomy 19:15**). Applied to textual claims, a finding is graded *Corroborated* when two or more independent passages state it, *Single witness* when one passage states it, and *Not in the text* when a claim commonly attached to these passages has no support in the Hebrew at all. The grading is meant to separate what the text says from what later readers have added, a distinction that has proved decisive in the history of Genesis 9 (Goldenberg, 2003).

III. THE AFRICAN NATIONS IN THE COVENANT OF NOAH

III-A. Africa in the Table of Nations

Africa enters the Hebrew Bible before Israel does. The second river of Eden, the Gihon, is said to wind through ***"the whole land of Cush"*** (**Genesis 2:13**). After the flood, the genealogy of **Genesis 10** lists the sons of Ham as ***"Cush, and Mizraim, and Put, and Canaan"*** (**Genesis 10:6**). Three of the four, Cush, Mizraim, and Put, are the names the rest of the Hebrew Bible uses for the peoples of the Nile and of North Africa. The sons of Mizraim include the Lehabim and the Pathrusim, the people of Upper Egypt (**Genesis 10:13–14**), and the sons of Cush include Seba and Sheba (**Genesis 10:7**).

THE AFRICAN LANDS NAMED IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

HEBREW NAME	STRONG'S	REGION INDICATED BY USAGE	KEY TEXTS
Cush (Kush), כּוּשׁ	H3568	The Nile kingdoms south of Egypt (Nubia; today's northern Sudan and southern Egypt), at the southern edge of the known world	**Genesis 2:13**; **10:6–8**; **Isaiah 18:1**; **Esther 1:1**

HEBREW NAME	STRONG'S	REGION INDICATED BY USAGE	KEY TEXTS
Cushite (Kushi), **כּוּשִׁי**	H3569	A person of Cush	**Numbers 12:1**; **2 Samuel 18:21**; **Jeremiah 13:23**; **38:7**
Egypt (Mitsrayim), **מִצְרַיִם**	H4714	Egypt, the Nile valley and delta; called ***"the land of Ham"*** in the Psalms	**Genesis 10:6**; **12:10**; **Psalms 105:23**; **Isaiah 19:25**
Put (Put), **פּוּט**	H6316	A people west of Egypt, usually identified with Libya	**Genesis 10:6**; **Jeremiah 46:9**; **Ezekiel 30:5**; **Nahum 3:9**
Libyans (Lubim), **לוּבִים**	H3864	The Libyans of North Africa	**2 Chronicles 12:3**; **16:8**; **Daniel 11:43**; **Nahum 3:9**

Note: Regions follow the usage of the texts listed. Cush does not match the borders of any single modern state (Unseth, 1999); Strong's numbers are given for reference only.

Two features of this genealogy matter for the question of covenant. The first is what it records and what it leaves out. Three times it describes the descendants of Noah ***"by their families, by their tongues, in their lands, by their nations"*** (**Genesis 10:5**, **20**, **31**). It records kinship, language, territory, and polity. It never records color, and it never ranks one people above another. Sadler's survey of the Cush texts reaches the same conclusion from the other direction: whatever the biblical writers noticed about Cushite appearance, they did not build a system of racial standing on it (Sadler, 2005).

The second feature is the covenant that comes immediately before the genealogy. After the flood, **Elohim** says to Noah and his sons: ***"I establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you"*** (**Genesis 9:9**). When **Elohim** sets His bow in the cloud, He calls it ***"the everlasting covenant between Elohim and every living soul of all flesh that is on the earth"*** (**Genesis 9:16**), and the chapter goes on to say that from the three sons of Noah ***"the whole earth was spread abroad"*** (**Genesis 9:19**). The descendants of Cush, Mizraim, and Put are therefore named in the text as heirs of the first covenant **Elohim** made with humanity after the flood. They were not added to it later; they were in it from the start.

וַאֲנִי הִנְנִי מֵקִים אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אִתְּכֶם וְאֶת־זַרְעֲכֶם אַחֲרֵיכֶם

"And I, behold, I establish My covenant with you and with your seed after you." (**Genesis 9:9**)

The promise to Abraham widens the same horizon. ***"In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed"*** (**Genesis 12:3**), and the word for families, ***families (mishpechot)***, is the word the Table of Nations uses for the peoples it lists (**Genesis 10:5**, **32**). The promise is repeated to Isaac and to Jacob

(**Genesis 26:4**; **28:14**). Read in its own context, the blessing of Abraham is addressed to the very families that **Genesis 10** has just named, African families among them.

Finding — The African peoples Cush, Mizraim, and Put are named among the descendants of Noah with whom the covenant of **Genesis 9** was made, and among the families of the earth to whom Abraham's blessing is addressed. **Corroborated** (**Genesis 9:9–19**; **10:5–7**, **32**; **12:3**; **28:14**).

Finding — Any color, rank, or lesser standing assigned to an African people in the Table of Nations. **Not in the text** (**Genesis 10**).

III-B. The Curse Spoken over Canaan, Not over Africa

No reading of the Hebrew Bible has done more harm in Africa than the misreading of **Genesis 9:25**. When Noah awoke, the text says, he said: ***"Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers"*** (**Genesis 9:25**). Three facts in the text itself govern the passage. The curse names Canaan, the fourth son of Ham, and does not name Ham or any of his other sons (**Genesis 9:25–27**; **10:6**). It names no skin, no color, and no bodily feature. And it is spoken by Noah, not introduced as a word of **Yahweh**. Canaan's descendants are listed by name: the Sidonians, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the other peoples of the land of Canaan in the eastern Mediterranean (**Genesis 10:15–19**). None of them is an African people in the text's own geography.

אָרוּר כְּנָעַן עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה לְאֶחָיו

"Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers." (**Genesis 9:25**)

The so-called curse of Ham is therefore a later construction. Goldenberg's history of the tradition shows how a curse on Canaan was gradually transferred to Ham, how stories about dark skin were joined to it in late antiquity and the medieval period, and how the combined story came to be used to justify the enslavement of Africans (Goldenberg, 2003). Sanders traced the next stage: once the slave trade was challenged, European writers turned the ***"Hamite"*** into a lighter-skinned outsider and credited him with whatever civilization they found in Africa (Sanders, 1969). The explorer John Hanning Speke applied this theory to the kingdoms around Lake Victoria, and colonial administrators in Rwanda and Burundi later used it to classify their subjects (Sanders, 1969), a history that Mamdani (2001) connects to the violence of the late twentieth century. Holter (2008) has documented how Old Testament commentators of the colonial era described the Cushites as ***"naturally"*** slaves, reading their own age into the text.

Both forms of the theory, the curse and the hypothesis, depend on claims the Hebrew text does not make. Neither has a single witness in the passage on which it was built.

Finding — The curse of **Genesis 9:25** falls on Canaan alone, whose descendants are the peoples of the land of Canaan, and names no color. **Corroborated** (**Genesis 9:25–27**; **10:6**, **15–19**).

Finding — That Ham, Cush, Egypt, Put, or any African people was cursed, or that dark skin or servitude is the mark of a curse. **Not in the text** (**Genesis 9:18–27**).

IV. AFRICANS INSIDE THE COVENANT STORY

Africans are not on the margins of the covenant narrative. They appear at turning points, and the text never presents their African origin as a fault.

IV-A. Hagar the Egyptian: the First to Name Him

The first person in the Hebrew Bible to give a name to the **Elohim** who spoke with her is an Egyptian woman. Hagar, the Egyptian servant of Sarai, fled into the wilderness, where the messenger of **Yahweh** found her by a spring and promised that her seed would be too many to count (**Genesis 16:1**, **7–10**). She answered by naming the One who spoke to her: ***"You are El Roi,"*** the **Elohim** who sees (**Genesis 16:13**). When she was later sent away with Ishmael, **Elohim** heard the boy's voice and promised, ***"I will make him a great nation"*** (**Genesis 21:17–18**). The Hebrew Bible therefore places an African mother at the root of the Ishmaelite peoples, whom Islamic tradition counts among its ancestors, and records her as one who was seen and answered by **Elohim**.

וַתִּקְרָא שֵׁם־יהוה הַדֹּבֵר אֵלֶיהָ אַתָּה אֵל רָאִי

"And she called the name of Yahweh who spoke to her, You are El Roi." (**Genesis 16:13**)

IV-B. Joseph in Egypt and the Mother of Two Tribes

Egypt was the land that fed the family of Jacob in famine. Joseph told his brothers, ***"Elohim sent me before you to preserve life"*** (**Genesis 45:5**; compare **50:20**), and Jacob, the father of Israel, stood before Pharaoh and blessed him (**Genesis 47:7**, **10**). In Egypt Joseph married Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest, and she bore Manasseh and Ephraim (**Genesis 41:45**, **50–52**). Jacob adopted both as his own sons, ***"as Reuben and Simeon"*** (**Genesis 48:5**), so that two whole tribes of Israel descend from an Egyptian mother. When Israel left Egypt, ***"a mixed multitude went up also with them"*** (**Exodus 12:38**), the ***great mixture (erev rav)*** that became part of the people at Sinai.

IV-C. The Cushite Wife of Moses

In the wilderness, Miriam and Aaron ***"spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman"*** (**Numbers 12:1**). **Yahweh** summoned them, defended Moses as His faithful servant, and struck Miriam with a skin disease, ***"white as snow"***

(**Numbers 12:4–10**). Whether this Cushite was Zipporah, the Midianite wife of **Exodus 2:21**, or a second wife is debated; **Habakkuk 3:7** sets ***"Cushan"*** beside Midian, and some readers take the two to be one people. The text does not settle the question, and no doctrine should rest on either answer. What the text does settle is that the one rebuked in the story is the one who spoke against the Cushite marriage, not Moses and not his wife. Adamo (2018) has drawn attention to the silence of this African woman in the narrative; the narrative's judgment, however, falls on her critics.

עַל־אֹדוֹת הָאִשָּׁה הַכֻּשִׁית אֲשֶׁר לָקָח כִּי־אִשָּׁה כֻשִׁית לָקָח

"Because of the Cushite woman whom he had taken, for he had taken a Cushite woman."

(Numbers 12:1)

IV-D. Ebed-melech the Cushite and Zephaniah Son of Cushi

In the last months before Jerusalem fell to Babylon, the princes of Judah threw the prophet Jeremiah into a cistern to die. The one man who went to the king on his behalf was ***"Ebed-melech the Cushite,"*** an official of the palace (**Jeremiah 38:7–9**). He gathered thirty men, let down old rags on ropes to pad them, and drew Jeremiah out of the mud (**Jeremiah 38:10–13**). **Yahweh** then sent Ebed-melech a personal promise, like the one later given to Baruch the scribe (**Jeremiah 45:5**):

"I will surely deliver you, and you shall not fall by the sword … because you have trusted in Me, says Yahweh" (**Jeremiah 39:15–18**).

In a chapter where the king and the princes of Judah perish or go into exile, an African is the one named as delivered for his trust. Adamo (2019) reads his intervention as a model of courageous protest against injustice.

כִּי־בָטַחְתָּ בִּי נְאֻם־יהוה

"Because you have trusted in Me, says Yahweh." **(Jeremiah 39:18)**

The prophet Zephaniah is introduced as ***"the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah"*** (**Zephaniah 1:1**). Whether the name Cushi marks African descent in his family is debated, but it is the prophet who carries that name whose book ends with worshipers coming from beyond the rivers of Cush (**Zephaniah 3:10**).

A Cushite also served as King David's messenger at the death of Absalom (**2 Samuel 18:21–32**), and Tirhakah, king of Cush, marched against the Assyrian army that threatened Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah (**2 Kings 19:9**; **Isaiah 37:9**). Historians identify him with Taharqa of Egypt's Twenty-Fifth Dynasty, a Nubian king (Hays, 1996).

INDIVIDUAL AFRICANS IN THE COVENANT NARRATIVE

PERSON	ORIGIN IN THE TEXT	ROLE IN THE COVENANT STORY	TEXTS
Hagar	Egypt	First person to name **Yahweh** (El Roi); mother of Ishmael, promised a great nation	**Genesis 16:1–13**; **21:17–21**
Asenath	Egypt (daughter of the priest of On)	Mother of Manasseh and Ephraim, two tribes of Israel	**Genesis 41:45**, **50–52**; **48:5**
The mixed multitude	Egypt	Went up with Israel and stood at Sinai	**Exodus 12:38**
The wife of Moses	Cush	Defended by **Yahweh**'s judgment on her critics	**Numbers 12:1–10**
The Cushite messenger	Cush	Royal messenger to David	**2 Samuel 18:21–32**
Tirhakah	Cush	King who marched against Assyria in Hezekiah's day	**2 Kings 19:9**; **Isaiah 37:9**
Ebed-melech	Cush	Rescued Jeremiah; promised deliverance for his trust in **Yahweh**	**Jeremiah 38:7–13**; **39:15–18**
Zephaniah son of Cushi	Debated	Prophet who foresaw worshipers from beyond Cush	**Zephaniah 1:1**; **3:10**

Note: Origins are given as the texts state them; the identification of the Cushite wife and the meaning of the name Cushi are debated.

Finding — Africans appear inside the covenant narrative as mothers of Israel's tribes and of Ishmael, as members of the people at Sinai, and as servants of Yahweh rewarded for their trust; the text never treats their African origin as a fault. Corroborated (Genesis 16:13; 41:50–52; Exodus 12:38; Numbers 12:1–10; Jeremiah 39:15–18).

IV-E. Covenant Law for the Stranger and the Egyptian

The covenant made at Sinai is often described as a covenant with one nation, and in its form it is. But its own law sets the terms on which every outsider may come in, and those terms make no distinction of origin.

At the first Passover the law states: ***"One law shall be for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you"*** (**Exodus 12:49**).

The same principle governs the offerings (**Numbers 15:15–16**) and the courts (**Leviticus 24:22**).

The word for the stranger, ***stranger, sojourner (ger)***, describes a person from another people who lives among Israel, and the law commands:

"The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (**Leviticus 19:34**; compare **Deuteronomy 10:18–19**).

תּוֹרָה אַחַת יִהְיֶה לָאֶזְרָח וְלַגֵּר הַגָּר בְּתוֹכָכֶם

"One law shall be for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." (**Exodus 12:49**)

One law is especially striking because it concerns the African nation that had enslaved Israel. Deuteronomy commands: ***"You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land,"*** and it opens the assembly of **Yahweh** to the third generation of Egyptians who join Israel (**Deuteronomy 23:7–8 [Hebrew 23:8–9]**). The law forbids Israel to carry the memory of Pharaoh's oppression into contempt for the Egyptian people. The prophet Isaiah carries the same open door to every foreigner who holds fast to the covenant, and he names the eunuch beside the foreigner, the very office held by Ebed-melech:

"Let not the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh say, Yahweh has utterly separated me from His people," for ***"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples"*** (**Isaiah 56:3–7**).

לֹא־תְתַעֵב מִצְרִי כִּי־גֵר הָיִיתָ בְאַרְצוֹ

"You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you were a stranger in his land." (**Deuteronomy 23:7 [Hebrew 23:8]**)

Finding — Covenant law admits the stranger under one law with the native, commands love for the stranger, and forbids Israel to abhor the Egyptian. Corroborated (**Exodus 12:48–49**; **Leviticus 19:33–34**; **Numbers 15:15–16**; **Deuteronomy 10:18–19**; **23:7–8**; **Isaiah 56:3–7**).

Finding — Exclusion of any African people from the covenant by birth or color. Not in the text (**Exodus 12:49**; **Isaiah 56:3**).

V. JUDGMENT AND BLESSING IN THE PROPHETS

V-A. One Standard of Judgment

The prophets of Israel speak often and severely about Egypt and Cush, and an honest reading must report this. Isaiah walked barefoot for three years as a sign that Egypt and Cush would be led away captive (**Isaiah 20:3–5**), and Ezekiel pronounced judgment on Pharaoh, who boasted, ***"My Nile is my own; I made it"*** (**Ezekiel 29:3**).

Nahum recalls that Cush and Egypt were the strength of Thebes, ***"Put and the Lubim were your helpers,"*** yet the city fell (**Nahum 3:9–10**). These oracles are not judgments on Africans as a people. They fall on the pride of rulers and on Judah's reliance on foreign armies instead of on **Yahweh** (**Isaiah 30:1–3**; **31:1**), and they use the same standard the prophets apply to Israel itself.

Amos makes the point in a single sentence that has puzzled readers for centuries:

"Are you not like the children of the Cushites to Me, O children of Israel? says Yahweh. Did I not bring up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and Aram from Kir?" (**Amos 9:7**).

Amos had already said that Israel's election made its accountability greater, not smaller (**Amos 3:2**). Here he tells Israel that descent gives it no shield against judgment, because **Yahweh** governs the history of the far nations as well. The Cushites in this verse are not a term of insult. They are the example of a distant people whom **Yahweh** also knows and rules (Sadler, 2005).

הֲלוֹא כִבְנֵי כֻשִׁיִּים אַתֶּם לִי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם־יהוה

"Are you not like the children of the Cushites to Me, O children of Israel? says Yahweh."

(**Amos 9:7**)

V-B. Blessed Be Egypt My People

The same prophets who announce judgment also announce a future for Egypt that is remarkable for a foreign nation. Isaiah foresees that ***"in that day there shall be an altar to Yahweh in the midst of the land of Egypt"*** (**Isaiah 19:19**);

that when the Egyptians cry to **Yahweh** because of oppressors, ***"He will send them a savior"*** (**Isaiah 19:20**);

that ***"Yahweh shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know Yahweh in that day"*** (**Isaiah 19:21**);

and that **Yahweh** will strike and then heal them (**Isaiah 19:22**).

The oracle ends by giving Egypt a title the Hebrew Bible otherwise reserves for Israel.

בָּרוּךְ עַמִּי מִצְרַיִם וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי אַשּׁוּר וְנַחֲלָתִי יִשְׂרָאֵל

"Blessed be Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

(Isaiah 19:25)

The phrase ***My people (ammi)*** belongs to the language of the Exodus covenant (**Exodus 3:7**; **6:7**). In **Isaiah 19:25** it is spoken of Egypt, the house of bondage itself, and set beside Israel as an equal recipient of blessing (**Isaiah 19:24**).

The ancient Greek translators found the verse so surprising that they rendered it as a blessing on Israelites living in Egypt; the Hebrew text says Egypt.

Finding — The prophets judge Egypt and Cush for the pride of their rulers and for Judah's reliance on them, by the same standard applied to Israel; they never judge Africans for their origin. Corroborated (Isaiah 20:3–5; 30:1–3; Ezekiel 29:3; Amos 3:2; 9:7).

Finding — Egypt will be called ***"My people"*** beside Israel. Only **Isaiah 19:25** states it in these words, though **Isaiah 19:19–24** and **Psalms 87:4** support its direction. **Single witness (Isaiah 19:25).**

V-C. Worshippers from Beyond the Rivers of Cush

The promises to Cush form a line through all three divisions of the Hebrew Bible. In the Prophets, Isaiah addresses ***"the land beyond the rivers of Cush"*** and describes its people as tall and smooth-skinned, a nation feared far and near (**Isaiah 18:1–2**). The chapter ends with those same people bringing a gift ***"to Yahweh of hosts, to the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts, Mount Zion"*** (**Isaiah 18:7**). Lavik (2021) has shown that the chapter's appealing portrait of Cush serves a rhetorical purpose: if even this powerful nation will submit to **Yahweh**, Judah should trust **Yahweh** rather than alliances.

Isaiah also foresees the labor of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush coming to Israel with the confession, ***"Surely El is in you, and there is none else"*** (**Isaiah 45:14**), followed by the universal call, ***"Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth"*** (**Isaiah 45:22**).

Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, gives the clearest promise of all. After the judgment of the nations, **Yahweh** says:

"Then I will turn to the peoples a pure lip, that they may all call on the name of Yahweh, to serve Him with one shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering" (**Zephaniah 3:9–10**).

מֵעֵבֶר לְנַהֲרֵי־כוּשׁ עֲתָרַי בַּת־פּוּצַי יוֹבִלוּן מִנְחָתִי

"From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering." **(Zephaniah 3:10)**

In the Writings, the Psalms carry the same hope. ***"Envoys shall come out of Egypt; Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to Elohim"*** **(Psalms 68:31 [Hebrew 68:32])**.

And when Psalm 87 lists the nations enrolled as citizens of Zion, it names Rahab, a poetic name for Egypt, together with Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, and Cush, and says of each, ***"This one was born there"*** **(Psalms 87:4)**.

כּוּשׁ תָּרִיץ יָדָיו לֵאלֹהִים

"Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to Elohim." **(Psalms 68:31 [Hebrew 68:32])**

Finding — The Hebrew Bible foresees worshipers from Cush and Egypt coming to Yahweh and enrolled in Zion, in the Prophets and in the Writings. Corroborated (Isaiah 18:7; 19:19–25; 45:14, 22; Zephaniah 3:9–10; Psalms 68:31; 87:4).

VI. WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN FOR AFRICA TODAY

The findings bear on three discussions in African biblical scholarship.

The first concerns translation. Adamo has argued, as Unseth (1999) reports, that the Hebrew term for Cush should often be rendered ***"Africa"*** so that African readers can see themselves in the text, while Unseth himself, writing from translation work in Ethiopia, and Holter (2000) have cautioned that the term refers to a particular ancient kingdom on the Nile and does not match any modern border. The present study supports a middle course. The texts make Cush an African nation beyond any doubt, and readers deserve to know that. But the strongest claims about Africa in the Hebrew Bible do not depend on the translation of one word. They rest on the covenant of **Genesis 9**, the law of the stranger, and the prophetic promises, which apply to every people of the continent, whether or not it descends from ancient Cush. Lokel (2006) and Van Heerden (2006) have both urged that the search for Africa in the Old Testament be grounded in careful method, and the witness criterion used here is offered as one such method.

The second discussion concerns the legacy of the Hamitic myth. Because the curse and the hypothesis both claimed biblical authority, it has sometimes been assumed that the Bible itself is the source of the problem. The textual evidence points the other way. The curse of **Genesis 9:25** does not name Africa, and the covenant texts that do name Africa speak of blessing, refuge, rescue, and promise. **The harm came from additions to the text.** A reading that returns to the text and tests each claim

against it is therefore not a defense of the colonial reading but the most direct answer to it (Goldenberg, 2003; Sanders, 1969).

The third discussion concerns the relation between the Hebrew Bible and African religious heritage. Mbiti's (1969) survey of African traditional religions found belief in one Creator across the continent's peoples. The Hebrew Bible itself speaks of one Creator of all peoples and asks, ***"Have we not all one father? Has not one El created us?"*** (**Malachi 2:10**). This study does not claim that African traditions and the Hebrew covenant are the same. It observes that the Hebrew Bible does not present its covenant as a foreign possession carried into Africa from outside. It presents Africa as present at the beginning, in the genealogy of Noah, in the household of Abraham, in the tribes of Israel, at Sinai, in the palace of Judah's last king, and in the promises of the prophets. Holter (2011) has observed that African Old Testament studies arose in dialogue with African concerns; the covenant texts examined here show that those concerns were already in the text.

For the follower of Yahweh in Africa, and for every reader of African descent anywhere, the meaning is plain. No one who reads the written covenant has any ground to look down on an African, and no African has any reason to think the knowledge of Yahweh belongs to someone else. The covenant of Noah included his fathers; the blessing of Abraham was spoken over his family; the law of Sinai gave him one law with the native; and the prophets named his land as a place from which worshipers would come. What remains is the choice the covenant puts before every person in every nation: to join himself to Yahweh, to keep His covenant, and to hold fast to it (Isaiah 56:6; Deuteronomy 30:19).

VII. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT

Each of the three great covenant traditions holds part of this picture well, and each has carried something the written covenant does not say. The audit sets them side by side under the same standard.

	✡ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
What the tradition holds	The written Torah places Cush, Egypt, and Put in Noah's line and forbids Israel to abhor the Egyptian. Judaism recognizes the Beta Israel of Ethiopia as Jews.	Christianity counts an Ethiopian among its first converts and keeps two of its oldest churches in Egypt and Ethiopia.	Islam honors Hajar, the mother of Ismail, and remembers Abyssinia as the first refuge of the believers.

	✡ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☪ ISLAM
Where it departs from the written covenant	The rabbinic tale of Ham's skin (Sanhedrin 108b) adds what **Genesis 9** does not say.	Christian writers built the curse of Ham and the Hamitic hypothesis on a verse that curses Canaan alone.	Later Muslim writers also repeated the curse of Ham against Black Africans, a reading the Qur'an itself does not make.
Covenant witness	**Deuteronomy 23:7** and **Isaiah 19:25** stand against contempt for Egypt.	**Genesis 9:25** and **10:15–19** answer the curse of Ham from the text.	**Genesis 16:13** records Hagar the Egyptian naming the One who saw her.

VIII. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

Under the standing rule of October 2, 2026, every correction found while preparing this document is listed here. Corrections marked Made have been entered in the affected Google Doc so the website copy can be replaced.

Correction 1 — Doc 307 (*Have We Not All One Father?*), Section III-H, item 3. The list of marriages across peoples says, ***"Moses married a Midianite and a Cushite (Exodus 2:21; Numbers 12:1)."*** Section III-G of the same document says the text does not settle whether the Cushite wife was Zipporah or a second wife. The two statements disagree. Corrected wording: ***"Moses married Zipporah the Midianite, and his wife is also called a Cushite; whether the two were one woman the text does not settle (Exodus 2:21; Numbers 12:1)."*** Status: Made in the Doc 307 Google Doc.

IX. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS

#	DECLARATION	BASIS
I	Every African people is named among the heirs of the everlasting covenant **Elohim** made with Noah and with all flesh.	**Genesis 9:9–16**; **10:6**
II	The curse spoken in **Genesis 9:25** fell on Canaan. No African nation was cursed, and no color of skin is a curse.	**Genesis 9:25–27**; **10:15–19**
III	The blessing of Abraham was spoken over all the families of the earth, and African families are among them.	**Genesis 12:3**; **28:14**

#	DECLARATION	BASIS
IV	Africans stand inside the covenant story as mothers of tribes, members of the people at Sinai, and servants delivered for their trust in **Yahweh**.	**Genesis 41:50–52**; **Exodus 12:38**; **Jeremiah 39:18**
V	There is one law for the native and the stranger, and Israel was commanded not to abhor the Egyptian.	**Exodus 12:49**; **Deuteronomy 23:7**; **Isaiah 56:3–7**
VI	**Yahweh** judges the rulers of every nation by one standard, and Israel's descent gave it no shield from that standard.	**Amos 3:2**; **9:7**; **Ezekiel 29:3**
VII	From beyond the rivers of Cush His worshipers will bring His offering, and Egypt will be called His people.	**Zephaniah 3:10**; **Psalms 68:31**; **Isaiah 19:25**

X. COVENANT RESPONSE

To the Jewish reader in Africa and beyond: the Torah you keep commands, ***"You shall not abhor an Egyptian"*** (**Deuteronomy 23:7**), and it gave two tribes of Israel an Egyptian mother. The Beta Israel of Ethiopia are your brothers by your own ruling. Let the written Torah, and not the later tale of Ham's skin, decide how Africa is spoken of in your houses of study.

To the Christian reader in Africa and beyond: your Scriptures tell of an African reading Isaiah on the road home. The curse of Ham that was preached over Africa for centuries was never in the text; **Genesis 9:25** names Canaan. Read the Cush texts of the Tanakh for yourself, from **Genesis 2:13** to **Zephaniah 3:10**, and test every sermon you have heard against them.

To the Muslim reader in Africa and beyond: you honor Hajar, and the Torah records that Hagar the Egyptian was seen by **Elohim** and gave a name to the One who saw her (**Genesis 16:13**). The first refuge of your community was an African kingdom. The written covenant gives no people a place above another by color, and it calls every nation to turn to **Yahweh** (**Isaiah 45:22**).

To every African reader of any faith or none: the knowledge of **Yahweh** is not a foreign possession brought to you from outside. The covenant of Noah included your fathers, and the prophets named your land as a place from which worshipers would come. Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution sends this study freely, so that the covenant may be read by Africans in their own words.

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"For then I will turn to the peoples a pure lip, that they may all call on the name of Yahweh, to serve Him with one shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones, shall bring My offering."

Zephaniah 3:9–10 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

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miqdashbethel.ai • miqdashbethel@gmail.com •

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