

“LIVING GODLY LIVES IN AN UNGODLY WORLD”

JUNE 24, 2020

DURING THE GREAT TIME OUT

“REVOLUTION OR TRANSFORMATION?”

PART 3: RACISM IN THE BIBLE

GENESIS 10; DEUTERONOMY 32:8-9

I. GRASPING “RACISM”

A. *Racism as it is spoken of by popular movements of political extremes has its origins in the 18th century and ran through the 20th century.*

1. *“White, black and yellow” or Caucasoid, Negroid and Mongoloid were based on skin color and outward features. It was the science of the day. Encyclopedia Britannica records:*

“Racial classifications appeared in North [America](#), and in many other parts of the world, as a form of social division predicated on what were thought to be natural differences between [human](#) groups. Analysis of the folk beliefs, social policies, and practices of North Americans about race from the 18th to the 20th century reveals the development of a unique and fundamental [ideology](#) about human differences. This ideology or “[racial worldview](#)” is a systematic, institutionalized set of beliefs and attitudes that includes the following components:

1. All the world’s peoples can be divided into biologically separate, discrete, and exclusive populations called races. A person can belong to only one race.
2. Phenotypic features, or visible physical differences, are markers or symbols of race identity and status. Because an individual may belong to a racial category and not have any or all of the associated physical features, racial scientists early in the 20th century invented an invisible internal element, “racial essence,” to explain such anomalies.
3. Each race has distinct qualities of temperament, morality, disposition, and intellectual ability. Consequently, in the popular imagination each race has distinct behavioral traits that are linked to its phenotype.
4. Races are unequal. They can, and should, be ranked on a gradient of inferiority and superiority. As the 19th-century biologist [Louis Agassiz](#) observed, since races exist, we must “settle the relative rank among [them].”

5. The behavioral and physical attributes of each race are inherited and innate—therefore fixed, permanent, and unalterable.

6. Distinct races should be [segregated](#) and allowed to develop their own institutions, [communities](#), and lifestyles, separate from those of other races.

These are the beliefs that wax and wane but never entirely disappear from the core of the American version of race differences. From its inception, racial ideology accorded inferior [social status](#) to people of African or Native American ancestry. This ideology was institutionalized in law and social practice, and social mechanisms were developed for enforcing the status differences.”

- B. Race then is a social construct that was thought to be based on solid science. It should be noted here that not all scientists were in agreement with the number of “races”. Nor were they in agreement with what determined those divisions. Much of the disagreement was founded upon the origin of man being polygenistic (people come from multiple separate creations in multiple locations) or monogenistic (people come from a single parental couple). Darwin was monogenistic.*
- C. It is to be remembered that science is not a static discipline, by a dynamic one. By its very nature of observe, question, test, prove or disprove and postulate it cannot be static; it is about change as new information is discovered. To those souls who cannot change or who are resistant to change this can be a problem. It is not wise to build the foundation of one’s life upon shifting sand but upon the solid, unchanging Word of God.*
- D. The Bible does not speak of race. It concludes that all men come from a single set of parents and therefore there is only one race. Modern science with studies of DNA have proven that among any two people on earth there will be little more than a percentage or two difference in the biological makeup, confirming that there is only one race as the Bible had taught.*
- E. The Bible does speak of ethnic differences, theological differences, and cultural differences.*
- 1. Ethnic differences were noted as the name of the father from which the nation, ethnos, had originated. Later the offspring of these fathers would go from simple family to tribes and then to separate nations. The separated families*

in their different God-determined locations were identified by the patriarch of that tribe.

- 2. Theological differences were established by the various principalities, or sons of God, that were the authorities placed over them at the division of all the earth into linguistic groups. The way the people related to the governing authorities developed those governors as “gods” that established their theology and their myths or histories.*
 - 3. Cultural differences have many determining factors. Geography, environment, language, their way of relating to the environment (economics), theology (rituals, worship), mythology (art and literature), interaction with other families, tribes, nations through war, trade, marriages, covenants etc.*
- F. Those differences exist due to the children born to Noah and his wife. All the nations on earth come from their three sons: Japheth, Shem and Ham. No racial phenotypes are even alluded to though various later studies that sought to classify humans tried to assign them racial divisions*
- G. Their children and the generations to follow had first gathered as one in the plain of Shinar and had built the city with a huge ziggurat, known to us as the Tower of Babel, but, due to their misguided purpose, were scattered across the earth in God-determined lands with boundaries*
- H. The way the Scriptures identify their way of relating to one another was not phenotypical but familial, theological, and culturally*

II. EXAMPLES OF BIBLICAL INTERACTIONS

- A. Selection of Abraham was not “racial”; not even mentioned. His family line as coming from Shem is mentioned. There is probably a skin color that may be attached due to the area, the culture and the genetics of his parents but it is irrelevant.*
- B. Abraham was called to live among the Canaanites. This will be the children of Canaan such as the Amorites, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Philistines and those still called the Canaanites. This had nothing to do with race but with the ethnic or familial dwellings of the people God had placed in that land.*
- C. Abraham is told he was going to be given this land as his possession as God was going to dispossess it from them for his*

- sake and for those of his family that would follow. This was about land ownership only.
- D. God's reason for dispossessing them was theological and consequently ethical, not racial. Genesis 15 It was not about inferiority or superiority but upon one's relationship to God. It is God who assigns people groups, nations, their land and their times (Acts 17:26-27) and it is God who calls them to repentance under His sovereign rule.
- E. Abraham interacted with all kinds of people while in Canaan since he was in the land of people distantly related to him but not directly in his family line. Since the land of Canaan was so named because it was occupied by relatives of Canaan, the son of Ham, the biggest majority of people with whom he dealt were Canaanites: Egyptians, Hittites, Jebusites.
1. He fought with some of his cousins, Elamites or Syrians, to regain his nephew, Lot, after he had been kidnapped from Sodom.
 2. His servant, Eliezer (my God is a helper), was from Damascus and was therefore a Syrian. He was one of his cousins in his family line of Shem.
 3. Hagar, by whom he had a son, Ishmael, was an Egyptian. Egyptian is another name for Mizraim, Ham's son.
 4. Sarah had Abraham send Hagar and her son, Ishmael, away from their household. It does not seem this was from racial prejudice but from jealousy that Abraham was paying attention to Ishmael, Ishmael was picking on Isaac or old wounds from Hagar belittling Sarah is not given in the text but it is likely it was some of all. We know it was especially the treatment Ishmael was giving Isaac.
 5. He bought the cave in which to bury his wife from Ephron, the Hittite.
 6. He deceived both an Egyptian and a Philistine about Sarah being his wife. Both are descendants of Ham.
 7. In each of these situations, nothing but their humanity and their family line is mentioned. There was no animosity shown to them; they are merely identified.
 8. But Abraham did not want their son marrying a Canaanite woman. He sent Eliezer back to their family to get Isaac a wife. We are not told why Abraham felt so strongly about this.

- F. There are many other illustrations of the interaction of the patriarchal family's interaction such as Isaac's interaction with the Canaanites and Philistines, Jacob's interaction with them, Joseph's being sold to the Ishmaelites, their cousins, and sold again to the Egyptians where he became number 2 to the Pharaoh. He married an Egyptian woman and had children with her who became the inheritors of his part in the division of the land of Promise. They were Ephraim and Manasseh.*
- G. Moses' family provides us with an illustration of what may be an example of the kind of racial prejudice that is typified by today's type of unjustified racism.*
- 1. Moses fled Egypt to get away from Pharaoh's anger for killing an Egyptian. He wound up in the Sinai peninsula and rescued a Midianite shepherdess from bullies.*
 - 2. Her father offers Moses a job and gives Moses his daughter, Zipporah, in marriage.*
 - 3. She had identified Moses as an Egyptian, perhaps from the clothes he was wearing. He is a descendant of Abraham, the Midianites were descendants of Abraham and Keturah and the Egyptians were descendants of Ham. If she is recognizing him as an Egyptian something was there to make her think he was different from her and looked like an Egyptian. I suppose the readers are just supposed to know from the text what that difference was.*
 - 4. Some years later, Moses has led the children of Israel out of Egypt and they are wandering through the wilderness with all the hassles of leadership. Apparently Zipporah, his Midianite wife, had died and Moses had remarried. This time he married a Cushite, one of the sons of Ham, also known as Ethiopians. The Cushites were dark-skinned folk who were known to dwell south of the land of Egypt. She was a dark-skinned woman.*
 - 5. Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses for marrying an Ethiopian. We do not know if that was a criticism for her skin color or because he had remarried someone not from Abraham's family. But that discussion led them into challenging Moses leadership. The Scriptures tell us, "The LORD heard them." He called a meeting of the three of them.*

6. *At the meeting, God expresses His displeasure that His choice of leader was being questioned by human beings who were in no position to question Him. Expressing my personal opinion, I think their objection to his wife was her skin color was demonstrated with the punishment given to Miriam. She was given a skin disease that was eating her skin off her body. Moses plead for her life spares her and heals her. But she is still put out of the camp for 7 days. This for sure speaks to the issue of not questioning God's choice for a leader but perhaps it also addresses the displeasure God has with anyone criticizing the way God has made someone in his unchangeables. He is not pleased with discrimination against the way God has made them.*

CONCLUSION: There are many other examples in the Scripture regarding the interaction of God's chosen people and the peoples of the rest of the world. People are identified by their family lines, tribal lines and ultimately national lines. Racial identification as we have come to know it is not even mentioned unless it has something to do with some significance in the telling such as giantism. When discrimination is shown in their interaction it is over character, theology, culture, location and/or relationship to Israel, not in skin color or any other phenotypical trait. They are also acknowledged for the strength of their faith in the LORD or by their wickedness. Even the familial relationships are not important if one changes his theology to faith in YHWH such as Ruth, the Moabitess or Rahab of Jericho. God's grace overwhelms any unchangeable or even one's family heritage if one turns to faith in YHWH. We do well to heed the counsel of God and look only on the theology of the person with whom we are having personal encounters.

NEXT WEEK: JESUS AND RACISM