

AFRICA WAS ALREADY THERE

The African Presence in the Biblical World

When I began looking more deeply at biblical history, one thing became impossible for me to ignore: **Africa was already there.**

Africa does not have to be added to the Bible to make the story more inclusive. African lands and African people already appear throughout the biblical narrative. Egypt, Cush, and places in North Africa are part of the geographical world in which the events of Scripture unfolded.

For many of us, that truth can feel surprising because the pictures we were shown did not always reflect the geography we were reading about. We may have learned Bible stories faithfully while never stopping to look at a map. Once I began paying attention to the places named in Scripture, I realized that understanding the biblical world requires us to take Africa seriously.

Egypt Is Everywhere in the Biblical Story

You cannot tell the biblical story without Egypt. Abraham went into Egypt during famine. Joseph was taken to Egypt and eventually rose to authority there. Jacob and his family settled there. Generations later, the Exodus story centers on Israel's departure from Egypt under Moses.

Egypt appears again and again after the Exodus as Israel and Judah interact with the nations around them. And in the New Testament, Matthew records that Joseph took Mary and the young Yeshua into Egypt when Herod sought the child's life.

So when I say Africa was already there, Egypt alone makes that undeniable. Africa is not merely a footnote to biblical history.

Cush: An African Land Named Throughout Scripture

Another name we need to know is **Cush**. Older English translations sometimes render Cush as "Ethiopia," but biblical Cush is generally associated with Nubia, south of ancient Egypt, particularly territory in what is now Sudan.

Scripture refers to Cushites in numerous places. Moses is described as having a Cushite wife in Numbers 12:1. Ebed-Melech the Cushite courageously intervened to rescue Jeremiah from the cistern in Jeremiah 38. Psalm 68:31 speaks of Cush stretching out her hands to God. Acts 8 tells of an Ethiopian official who had traveled to Jerusalem to worship and encountered Philip on his journey home.

These are not modern additions to the text. They are part of the biblical record.

North Africa Was Part of the New Testament World

The African presence does not stop with Egypt and Cush. The New Testament also introduces us to **Simon of Cyrene**, who was compelled to carry Yeshua's cross. Cyrene was an ancient city in Cyrenaica, in present-day Libya in North Africa.

Acts also mentions people from Egypt and parts of Libya near Cyrene among those present at Pentecost, and later refers to believers connected with Cyrene. These references remind me that the earliest Christian world was geographically broader than the images many of us inherited.

What the Bible Does - and Does Not - Tell Us

As important as this history is, I also believe we have a responsibility to handle it honestly. The Bible was written in ancient cultural settings, long before today's American racial categories of "Black" and "white" developed. We should not force modern racial labels onto every ancient person when the evidence does not allow us to do so.

At the same time, we should not erase Africa from the story simply because later religious artwork often centered European-looking figures. **Artwork is interpretation; geography is evidence.** Egypt is in Africa. Ancient Cush was associated primarily with Nubia south of Egypt. Cyrene was in North Africa. Those geographical facts matter.

For me, studying this history is not about replacing one inaccurate picture with another. It is about opening the Scriptures, examining the historical setting, and being willing to follow the evidence.

Why This Matters to Me

As a Black woman and a believer, I believe our people deserve to know that Africa has a meaningful place in the biblical world. Our children should not grow up believing that biblical history happened in a world completely disconnected from Africa and African people.

But I also do not want identity to become more important than Yahweh. Learning history should deepen our understanding, not become an excuse for pride, hatred, or division. If studying the past does not lead us toward truth, righteousness, wisdom, and love, then we have missed something important.

This is why Rooted Kingdom Ministries will ask questions. We will study Scripture. We will examine geography and history. We will distinguish documented evidence from tradition and interpretation. And when something remains uncertain or debated, we will say so.

Africa Was Already There

Before modern denominations, before European paintings of biblical scenes, and before our contemporary racial categories, Africa was already part of the biblical landscape.

So this first lesson is our foundation:

We do not have to insert Africa into the Bible.

We simply have to stop overlooking where Africa was already there.

Scriptures for further study: Genesis 12:10; Genesis 41:47; Exodus 1:14; Numbers 12:1; Psalm 68:31; Jeremiah 38:7-13; Matthew 2:13-15; Matthew 27:32; Acts 2:10; Acts 8:26-40; Acts 11:20; Acts 13:1.

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- Malisa Michelle
Founder, Rooted Kingdom Ministries

Historical note: Biblical Cush is generally associated with Nubia south of ancient Egypt, especially areas of present-day Sudan. Cyrene was an ancient North African city in present-day Libya. Modern racial categories do not map neatly onto ancient populations, so this article distinguishes geographical evidence from later racial interpretation.

Selected historical references: Knut Holter, "Africans in the Bible," *Old Testament Essays* 36/1 (2023); UNESCO documentation on ancient Cyrene; Encyclopedia of the Bible entry on Ethiopia/Cush.