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# The Gospel and Race

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# OT Wisdom Literature

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- ❖ The promised Davidic King would rule over the nations (i.e. his rule and his people would include people from every land, language, clan, and nation—Genesis 10:5, 20, 31)
- ❖ Psalm 2:8, “Ask me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession.”
- ❖ Psalm 18:43-44: “You have delivered me from the attacks of the people; you have made me the head of nations. People I did not know now serve me, foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey me” (cf. 2 Sam 8, 10)
- ❖ Psalm 22:27-28: “All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations”

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# OT Wisdom Literature

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- ❖ The promised Davidic King would rule over the nations
- ❖ Psalm 45:17: “I will perpetuate your memory through all generations; therefore the nations will praise you for ever and ever.”
- ❖ Psalm 47:8-9: “God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne. The nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham, for the kings of the earth belong to God; he is greatly exalted.”
- ❖ Psalm 67: David M. Howard—“No other psalm captures more clearly and simply the grand vision that God is the God of all peoples and nations.”
- ❖ Psalm 68:31: “Envoys will come from Egypt; Cush will submit herself to God”
- ❖ Psalm 72:8-11, 17: God’s ruler will rule the nations and mediate the blessing of Abraham to all peoples

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# OT Wisdom Literature

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- ❖ The promised Davidic King would rule over the nations
  - ❖ Psalm 86:10: “All the nations you have made will come and worship before you, Lord; they will bring glory to your name.”
  - ❖ Psalm 87: This psalm affirms “that the nations—not just Israel—will be counted as citizens of Zion.”
  - ❖ Psalm 96:7: “Ascribe to the Lord, all you families of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.”
  - ❖ Psalm 98:2: “The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations.”
  - ❖ Psalm 102:15: “The nations will fear the name of the lord, all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.”
  - ❖ Psalm 117: a psalm that displays “God’s concern for all peoples and nations.”

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# OT Prophets: Isaiah

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- ❖ While the focus of the prophets is on Israel's faithlessness and calling her to repentance, they do present a picture of God's intention—that Israel would be a witness to the nations and that there would be one multi-racial, multiethnic people, worshiping and serving God.
- ❖ One of the things to keep in mind when you read Isaiah is that during his time period (740-700 BC), Egypt was ruled by Cushites.
  - ❖ The Twentieth-Fifth Dynasty lasted from 760-656 BC; it is also called the Nubian or Cushite Dynasty. It was during this period that the pyramids were built.
- ❖ And so, when Isaiah refers to Egypt, he is referring to the nation currently ruled by black Africans; he will refer to Cush eight times, but to Egypt more frequently. Again, if we think of race in terms of "color," we will need to recalibrate to understand the Bible at this point.
- ❖ "The book of Isaiah advances the concept of equal salvation for all peoples and nations more than any other prophetic book. The prophet paints an eschatological picture of people from all nations blending together with the remnant of Israel as the true people of Yahweh" (Hays, 106).

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# OT Prophets: Isaiah

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- ❖ Isaiah 2:2-4: “all nations” and “many peoples” will come to Zion, be ruled by Messiah, and know peace among themselves.
- ❖ Isaiah 11:10-16: God will gather “his people” from the nations, from the farthest point north (Assyria) and south (Cush), from Israel’s enemies; they will also submit to the Branch, “the Root of Jesse” (cf. Rom 15:12)
- ❖ Isaiah 18: the entire chapter is a prophecy about Cush—it “is not a proclamation of judgment on Cush, but rather judgment on Judah—a judgment that Cush will see and respond to positively” (Hays, 109).
- ❖ Isaiah 19-20: turn the attention to Egypt (which is being ruled by Cush). In the midst of judgment, there is salvation—19:19-25. Inclusion for non-Jews (black Cushites, racially-mixed Egyptians, Semitic/Indo-European Assyrians) in God’s people.

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# OT Prophets: Isaiah

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- ❖ Isaiah 27:13: “And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem” (cf. 2:2-4; 19:19-25)
- ❖ Isaiah 42:4-7: Israel as God’s servant (foreshadowing the Messiah as God’s servant) was “to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles.”
- ❖ Isaiah 45:14 (cf. 45:22-25): the mention of chains is a guide of speech indicating their voluntary submission and glad surrender to Yahweh (Oswalt, 215). The main point is the submission of the nations—Egypt, Cush, Sabeans—to Yahweh and inclusion among his people.
- ❖ As an aside, the Bible seems to refer to two sets of “Sabeans”: one set related to Cush (Gen 10:7) and another set related to Eber (Gen 10:25)—hence, one black African and another Semitic. It is likely that this reference in Isaiah 45 is a reference to the African group, in parallel with Egypt and Cush.

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# OT Prophets: Isaiah

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- ❖ Isaiah 49:6: “He says: It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth” (cf. Acts 13:47)
- ❖ Isaiah 51:4-6: The servant of the Lord will be a light to the nations
- ❖ Isaiah 56:6-7: “Foreigners” who bind themselves to the Lord will be brought to God’s holy mountain, his “house of prayer” (cf. Matt 21:13)
- ❖ Isaiah 66:18-21: God will gather people from “all nations and languages” and some of them will be “priests and Levites” (cf. Genesis 10; 1 Pet 2:9-10)



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# OT Prophets: Minor Prophets

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- ❖ Amos 9:11-12: God will restore the Davidic King so that he might rule over “all the nations that bear my name” (cf. 9:7)
- ❖ Micah 4:1-5: A vision very similar to Isaiah 2:2-4 (made concurrently, perhaps; Micah prophesies between 750-686 BC).
- ❖ Zephaniah 1:1 (son of Cushi, “the Cushite”; likely a black Jew); Zephaniah was uniquely interested in the sin and future restoration of the Cushites: 2:12 (the defeat of the Cushites / Egyptians by Assyrian in 663 BC), 3:9-10

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# Summary

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- ❖ From Genesis 12 on, while God's focus is especially on Abraham's family (Israel), he continually demonstrates his intention to bless "the families" of the earth through them.
- ❖ This intention to bless is revelatory—telling the truth about God—but is especially salvific—including the nations among God's people through faith/identification with Israel's God.
- ❖ Hence, God's intention throughout the OT is for his people to be multi-racial and multi-ethnic, including black Africans, Egyptians, Assyrians, and other nations.
- ❖ The mission of the Messiah, the promised Davidic King, will be to bring this about: to extend and expand his people to include Jew and Gentile, people from every territory, clan, nation, and language.

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# Discussion Questions

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- ❖ Once you start paying attention to the repetition of the “nations” and the “peoples” in the Psalms, you see it everywhere. In what ways do these categories (drawn from Genesis 10) help us recognize that God’s mission is to call a diverse people drawn from a range of racial and ethnic peoples to himself? How should that shape our understanding of “the people of God”?
- ❖ Likewise, the prophets emphasize the same with their usage of the “nations” and “peoples.” But they explicitly connect the inflow of the nations with the coming Davidic King, the Messiah. Discuss the ways in which the psalms and the prophets prepare us from Jesus’s own mission—that he was not simply calling a single people to himself, but he had come for the diverse peoples of the world.