READING JEREMIAH 13:23 IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the meaning and importance of Jeremiah 13:23 critically. The author argues that one of the greatest prophets of ancient Israel, having been familiar with the military might, wisdom and vastness of their African territories does not despise black African people but uses them as standards against which to evaluate Israel in Jeremiah 13:23 as did other biblical passages (Amos 9:7; Is 17:3, 11-15; 30:1-2; 31:1-3; 45:14; Ez 27:7; Dn 11:43). The reasons for using black people and nations as standards against which to evaluate Israel are: first, their vast territories, great military might and power, wealth and wisdom (Is 19:5, 11-15; Is 45:14; Ez 27:7; Dn 11:43); second, it makes their high esteem to be boosted when these nations are cited as paradigmatic. The central theological message of Jeremiah 13:23 is to address the question of Judah's habituation of sin which leads to slavery that is irredeemable. Judah has an indelible stain and "her evil habits held her fast like bands of steel". The various English translations of Jeremiah 13:23 in different English versions of the Bible are misleading and therefore a disservice to the black race all over the world. The proper translation according to this author should have been:

"Would Black Africans change their skin or the leopards their sports?
So also you who have learnt to do evil could do evil."

INTRODUCTION[1]

> "Can Ethiopians change their skin or leopards their spots?
>
> Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil."
>
> (Jr 13:23, NRSV).

[1] This is a reworked version of the paper presented at the congress of the South African Society for Near Eastern Studies, Bloemfontein, South Africa, 9-10 September 2013.

The historical background of the book of Jeremiah

The historical background of the life of the prophet Jeremiah is necessary because it is difficult to understand Jeremiah 13:23 and the entire chapter without first of all understanding the historical background of the book. This will also explain the prophet Jeremiah's familiarity with the international situation, especially Africa (Egypt and Kush). It will enable readers to know that the book of the prophet Jeremiah is a product of a fierce international situation, which is the reason for the chaotic order of the book.

The content of the book of Jeremiah spans the difficult period from about 622-587 B.C.E. The prophetic figure called Jeremiah and his message coincide with the years following Josiah's reforms (622-609 B.C.E.) and the period of the subjugation of Judah by Pharaoh (609-605, 601-598 B.C.E.) and then Babylon (604-601, 597-538 B.C.E.). This period thus reflects the shifting fortunes from its short "nationalistic exuberance" under Josiah to a desperate search for security and leadership amid Egypt's and Babylon's international contest for control of Syria/Palestine (609 B.C.E.) (Matthews 2012:141). The death of Josiah during the battle of Megiddo brought the end of the expansionist plans to reunite the territory of Israel and Judah. It also reduced Josiah's energy for further implementation of most of his reforms. The hope to have a political autonomy was dashed for Judah; instead, a new era of superpower clashes drew in. Pharaoh Necho II quickly installed a puppet king in Judah, in the person of Jehoahaz's brother who was pro-Egyptian. Immediately Jehoahaz was taken hostage to Egypt in Africa.

After the defeat of the Africans (Cush-Egyptians) at the battle of Carchemish (604 B.C.E.), Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon gained control of the former Assyrian empire in Mesopotamia and Syria. But all of a sudden, Jehoiakim found himself a Babylonian vassal (2 Kgs 24:1), although he was not truly loyal to the Babylonians because he revolted about three years later based on the Egyptian/African promise of protection. The African (Egyptian) protection ended in 598 when the Babylonians invaded and captured Jerusalem, thus ending the strong belief in the myth of inviolability of Jerusalem (Is 31:4-5) (Matthew 2012:141). After the successful capture of Jerusalem,

Jehoiachin who had reigned for just a few months was deported to Babylon. The Babylonian king then installed a puppet king called Mattaniah after changing his name to Zedekiah to signify his new status (2 Kgs 24:17).

Very few scholars concern themselves with the question of the passages in the book of Jeremiah that mention repeatedly the *Cush*/Cushites. Perhaps, they do not know the importance of Jeremiah's connection and association with Africans. A close examination of the book shows that the person of Jeremiah, though not pro-African (Egyptian), is very familiar with the Africans and has great respect for them. In the Major Prophets, there are examples of unusual identification of Africans. The book of Jeremiah is exceptional. The writer of Jeremiah 36:14 has a list of the important personalities involved. Among the important participants identified personally is "Yehudi ben Nethaniah ben Shelemiah ben 'Cushi'" (36:14, 21, 23). There are several unusual features about the personal identification of Yehudi. It is very unusual and remarkable that Yehudi's ancestry was traced to the third generation.[2] Literally his

[2] In an attempt to clarify these unusual features mentioned above, several explanations have been suggested. One explanation is that the tracing of Jehudi's ancestry to the third generation is an answer to fulfil the requirement of the Deuteronomic law (Dt 23:7-8), that is, only the Egyptians of the third generation will be qualified to enter the Lord's assembly. A close examination of Dt 23:7-8 shows that the text does not mention Africa south of Egypt or Ethiopia. A careful examination of the same passage also reveals that the names of African's (*Cushi*) son (*Shelmayahu*) and grandson (*Nathanyahu*) indicate that they were already followers of Yahweh. That is why their names were compounded by the ending *yahu.* Since Jehudi means Jew, Jehudi has become also a fully-fledged Jew. Therefore, the above explanation is unsatisfactory and unacceptable. Another explanation offered is that African's (*Cushi*'s) father who was a native Israelite was on a mission to Africa at the time of his birth. Yehudi was then given to his grandson to celebrate his grandfather's return from abroad and to distinguish him from his brother, who was probably born to a non-Israelite mother. This explanation, of course, has no basis in either the biblical text or extra-biblical tradition. Some scholars see this long trace of genealogy as so exceptional that they call for an emendation of the text so that two personalities instead of one will be involved (Hyatt 1956:1066). Accepting the opinion of Cornill and Rudolph, Hyatt (1956:1066) thinks that in the phrase *Yehudi ben Nathanyahu ben Shelemayahu* the original *waeth* might have become *ben.* Thus, the phrase would have originally read "Yehudi ben Nathaniah and Shelemiah ben Cushi". Volz (cited in Rice 1975:106) suggested another similar explanation that the Nethaniah ben Shelemiah referred to in Jr 36:14 as Africa's (*Cushi*) is distinct from and has no relationship with Yehudi of Jr 36:21, 23. The above emendation is questionable on the ground that there is no ancient tradition to support it. Moreover, such textual emendation changes the author's intention and leaves the reader with the impression that since Yehudi seemed to have played such an important role in the whole incident, his

name means "Jew." However, his great-grandfather (*Cushi*) means "black". This issue will be appropriately dealt with in this paper. Scholars who are prejudiced against people of colour would normally interpret Jeremiah 13:23 as if the prophet was prejudiced against black Africans.[3]

This author intends to examine the various English translations of Jeremiah 13:23, "Can Ethiopian change his skin or leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil". This paper seeks to arrive at a better translation that will elucidate the correct meaning of the passage. With such suggested translation the question whether one of the greatest prophets of ancient Israel meant to despise the black skin of Africans as some modern exegetes think will be eliminated. This essay also sheds light on the central theological meaning of Jeremiah 13. In order to achieve this aim, this paper examines briefly the state of Jeremianic studies, the literary analysis of Jeremiah 13, the meaning of "Cush" in Jeremiah 13:23 and the theological

ancestors could not be from Africa. There is a possibility that this is the purpose of such emendation which leads some scholars to assume that Yehudi was a messenger or petty official or ordinary clerk. Looking at the text, it is easy to conclude rashly that Yehudi was one of the subordinate officials. The princes sent Jehudi to bring Baruch; Jehoiakim sent him to bring Baruch's scroll; Yehudi also read the scroll before the king (36:21, 23). However, a careful examination of the role he played shows that he was probably the most trusted and the most "respected man on the scene". That was probably why he was called upon by the king's ministers and the king himself at the time of such a serious threat and impending crisis (Jeremiah's letter). It is possible that he was the only one among the king's ministers "who transcended party strife" (Rice 1975:107). If it is remembered that during the discovery of the temple scroll in the days of Josiah (621 B.C.E.), Shaphan, the secretary of state, read the newly discovered scroll which led to the national reformation, the only logical conclusion is that Yehudi was not only of African ancestry, he was probably one of the highest and most educated royal state officials. This conclusion is strengthened if one notices that out of so many officials present, he was the only one asked to read such an important and sensitive document. This can also be supported by the fact that the business of writing and reading belonged to the professional in those days. I should also add that the writer and the final editor of the book of Jeremiah wanted to demonstrate why Africans were so greatly respected throughout ancient Israel. That is because of their wisdom, military strength and their willingness to defend ancient Israel.

3 For example, McKane sees the Cushi of I Samuel 18 as black African Negro slaves (McKane 1963:1143). Hammershaimb, Harper, Mays, Ullendorf, and others think that the Cushites in Amos 9:7 were compared with Israelites because Israelites knew the Cushites who were from Africa as coming from "a despised nation; they were a dark-skinned and uncivilized people whom the children of Israel knew mainly as slaves" (Hammashaimb 1970:134; Mays1969:157; Ullendorf 1968:9; Harper 1915:192).

importance of this quotation.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE STATE OF JEREMIANIC STUDIES

Since the 1980s the study of biblical prophecy and prophetic books has been going through a paradigm switch or a period of transition (Nissinen 2009:103). This is evident in the variety of methods to be enumerated below. There are several areas of contentious issues on which Jeremianic studies is centred: the composition of the book of Jeremiah, Baruch the scribe, Deuteronomic edition of Jeremiah, the relation of the Masoretic text to the Septuagint, and the feminist imagery in Jeremiah. Since this paper is not centred on the entire book of Jeremiah but a passage (Jr 13:23), the author will only be able to discuss some few scholars who have made immense contributions to these contentious issues mentions above.

According to Matthew, the first person section of the book of Jeremiah probably contains much of the prophet's own words which demonstrates his deep emotions of anger, frustration, and great personal loss (e.g., Jeremiah 8:18-22; 12:1- 4; 20:7-12), but the third person section of Jeremiah are less personal and allow the reader to get away from the emotional intensity of the first person section (Matthew 2012:143).

The composition of the book of Jeremiah

Broadly speaking, there are many ways of reading Jeremiah, but radically different explanations have emerged over the past decade of Jeremianic studies (Carroll 2008:198). Since the 1980s scholarship with a traditional historical-critical approach to Jeremianic studies was championed by John Bright, J. Thompson and Holladay (Bright 1965; Thompson 1980; Holladay 1989). According to Holladay, "there are no data which counter the claim that the portrait of Jeremiah depicted in the book is reliable" (Holladay 1989:24-25). McKane believes in the historical Jeremiah but isolated chapters 1-25 from the work of historical Jeremiah as we have it now (McKane 1986: xlix-l).

Another way of reading and interpreting Jeremiah can be associated with Carroll

who employs an ideological-critical analysis of the text of Jeremiah (Carroll 1986:65-82). Carroll sees the tropes and rhetoric of the book of Jeremiah as collapsing under the weight of their own internal incoherence and contradictions which do not encourage any historical reading of the book. Carroll reads the book of Jeremiah as "a collection of polyphonic voices reflecting the reconstruction of the Palestinian communities in the second Temple period" (Carroll 2008:198). According to Carroll, there has been an extensive editorial interference and recontextualisation in order to transform Jeremiah's poetry beyond its original purpose in the service of an ideology that is quite foreign to Jeremiah (Carroll 2008:198). He calls it a postmodernist approach that is revolutionary (Carroll 2008:198). The book of Jeremiah is not arranged in good chronological order (Chase 2011:9). According to Jones, the literary deposit of Jeremiah's work is to be found in chapters 1-25 and he, allowing for glosses in the text, still believes that the "creative originator who generated the text in the first place was the prophet Jeremiah" (Jones 1992:63).

According to Shule, the book of Jeremiah should not be seen as a complex compilation process with different redaction layers since both the prose and the poetic language share similar set of vocabularies that could have been used by the prophet Jeremiah and his generation (Shule 2013:131). Despite the book's dense and chaotic character (Murphy 2009:306-318) the book is readable because there is a theological coherence amidst the chaos (Stulman 2005:13).

When one understands that the book of Jeremiah is a product of a fiercely troubled international situation, the book's chaotic order may be as a result of that troubled time. It shows that Jeremiah is familiar with these international powers such as Babylon and Africa (Egypt-Cush).[4] This also gives the evidence that the prophet is very familiar with black skin colour because by the eighth century and up to the sixth century Africans (Cush and Egypt) became the hope of ancient Israel against the Assyrian and Babylonian powers (Adamo 2010:477-484) That is why the prophet was able to use the well-known metaphor of African skin colour and leopard spots.

[4] More detail on Egypt as a black African country will be discussed later.

Baruch the scribe

The figure of the scribe, Baruch, raises some problems among modern interpreters of Jeremiah. Apart from the uniqueness of a prophet going around with a scribe as his companion, the figure of Baruch also appears in the post-biblical literature as a writer, and the more dominant companion of the prophet Jeremiah (Carroll 1989:91-94). Archaeological findings for a *Berekyahu* dated by literary reference to the book of Jeremiah has convinced many scholars that the Baruch figure in the text reflects a historical person rather than a literary representation of the historical figure (Avigad 1986; King 1993:93-99). In 1975 about 200 pieces of clay bullae dated to the sixth century B.C.E. was discovered in the shop of an antiquities dealer in East Jerusalem. This seal was called the seal of Baruch. The first three lines on Baruch bulla read "[Belonging] to *Berekhyahu*, the son of *Neriyahu*" (Pope 1975).[5] No one seems to fit perfectly well to be the author of the book of Jeremiah than the person of Jeremiah who has travelled to Babylon (either in spirit or in person), Africa and possibly other places. He was very familiar with all short of literary expertise.

The relation of the Masoretic text to the Septuagint

It is well known that there are some significant differences between the Hebrew and the Greek versions of the book of Jeremiah. There are differences of opinions as to what is responsible for the differences: (1) accidental oversight; (2) deliberate translational abridgment; and (3) literary perspective (Allen 2008:4). The complexities of this relationship constitute part of the ongoing debate. Generally, Jeremiah studies have tended to work with the Hebrew text and its translations into vernacular languages without much attention to the implications raised by the differences in the Greek texts of Jeremiah, but in recent decades considerable energy has been spent on the comparative study of the Hebrew and Greek traditions of Jeremiah. There is a tendency to regard the Greek texts as earlier than the Hebrew text and the Hebrew text is considered to be the second edition of the book of Jeremiah (Carroll 2008:203). The fact is that good cases can be made for both. Therefore, the whole situation appears to

[5] This seals are now displayed in Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

be more complex than it seems.[6] It is quite interesting that while the term Cush/Egypt occurs 53 times in the LXX, the term occur in the MT 67 times in the book of Jeremiah. This indicates that the prophet Jeremiah is very familiar with black Africans (Cush/Egypt) (Galvin 2011:125).[7]

Feminine imagery in the book of Jeremiah

Some feminine readers of the book of Jeremiah are not comfortable with the so-called "religious pornography" in the book of Jeremiah. Feminist scholars therefore question the ethics of reading the book because of the negative image of women in such a sacred book in modern society. The feminist voices include H. Eilberg-Schwartz, K. O'Connor, and R. Weems (Eilberg-Schwartz 1994:100-107; O'Connor 2012:267; Weems 1995:94). According to O'Connor, the book of Jeremiah is a book about trauma, disaster, and survival. Most of the time, images of women in the book of Jeremiah are stereotyped. The book blames women for the disaster that befell Judah (O'Connor 2012:267-271).

JEREMIAH'S GUILD IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Jeremiah's scroll remains under interpretative siege by the expert voices, that is, the scroll of Jeremiah is still invaded by scholars with expert technical skills, creativity, and erudition (Diamond 2008:232-248). Still the guild cannot agree upon the actual compositional makeup of the book of Jeremiah. The question whether the person of Jeremiah is a fable or an actual historical person is still very debatable. First, there are scholars who can be grouped as "historicist-biographical readers". "Historicist readers of alternative bent and redaction critics continue to proliferate compositional agents for the scroll" (Diamond 2008:232-248). Carroll and his followers are sceptical and

6 Scholars should take caution in making hasty conclusion concerning the Greek and the Hebrew versions of the text of Jeremiah. However, since this article is not on the comparison of the texts, space will not allow the author to concentrate more on the subject.

7 By the eighth century up to the sixth centuries, one can scarcely make a distinction between Egyptians and the Cushites because the Cushites had overrun Egypt (Adamo 2010:478).

question the assumption about the historicity of the Jeremianic traditions and prefer a fictional prophetic figure. Some scholars are inspired by the commentary of McKane (1986, 1996) who stressed the concept of a rolling corpus, "a compositional process characterized" by extreme incoherence, "lacking in any overarching systematic editorial rationale". Though not all their followers agreed in every detail, the work of Carroll and McKane have shaped "the texture of Jeremiah's scholarship and created a recognisable approach shared by many scholars" (Diamond 2008:233). For this reading, no new historical data about Jeremiah has yet been available and no new argument in favour of this way of reading is offered in current reiterations of Jeremiah's romance (Diamond 2008:240).

Fable of compositional history of the book of Jeremiah

There is general agreement that there are complications and frustrations when one tries to read the book of Jeremiah – the complexity of literary production of the tradition. Even experts also acknowledge it (Fretheim 1987:81; 2001:110; O'Connor 2012:267-271). The person of Jeremiah as a fable or a product of the imagination is attested to by many scholars (Hill 2002; Parke-Taylor 2000; Sharp 2003; Stipp 2000). Many others advocate multiple literary agents producing the resultant editorial work (Hill 2002; Stipp 2000).

The theological reading of the book of Jeremiah

A theological reading of Jeremiah is constructed for the sake of confessional communities. Acknowledging the desire to render Jeremiah's divine symbol more palatable, more meaningful and more serviceable to modern needs and states, a theological reading of Jeremiah is suggested (Brueggemann 2000, 2002; Clements 2004; Fretheim 2002; Miller 2001; Kessler 2003; O'Connor 2001; Stulman 2005). The theological reading helps in decoding the thematic message of the book of Jeremiah.

The rhetorical critical reading of the book of Jeremiah

Rhetorical critical reading of the book of Jeremiah was embraced by Muileburg, and

Lundbom also expanded it (Muilenburg 1968; Lundbom 1999:68-84). Scholars embraced the study of Jeremiah through metaphor, symbol and myth (Hayes 2002; Eynde 2001).

The historical biographical reading of the book of Jeremiah

The historical biographical reading of the book of Jeremiah has been accepted by many scholars (Chisholm 2002; Gillat Gilad 2000; Holladay 2003:185-189; Lundbom 1999; Carroll 2004; de Jong 2011:483-510). These scholars believe that the reading of the book of Jeremiah makes sense if the historical biographical method of reading is employed. In other words, Jeremiah should be accepted as a historical person and that the book represents the work of the person of Jeremiah (Carroll 2008:195-216).[8]

The purpose of the above summary of the state of Jeremianic studies is not for mere compilation of information, but to demonstrate the state of negligence of the study of the prophet Jeremiah's concern with African (blackness) in his book despite such extensive study. The many times that the prophet Jeremiah mentions Africa and Africans and their blackness (67 in the MT and 53 in the LXX) shows that he cherished them. It appears unfortunate to this author that the majority of Jeremianic scholars are preoccupied with dates, composition, methodologies, feminism, textual matters and others as stated above, but ignore the prophet Jeremiah's concern for Africa and Africans, their identity (blackness), and his own familiarity with these people. He uses the word *cush* (literally "black"), even in the modern Hebrew, to refer to Africa and its people. This is because the prophet Jeremiah is very familiar with Africa and the people whom he identifies as black people including Egypt. The reason is that at that ancient time the majority of the citizens of the portion called Africa today were black in colour, including ancient Egypt (Adamo 2013:409-425; Adamo 2013:71-89; Adamo 2014:1-20).[9] One wonders then why most of the Jeremianic

[8] There exist also postcolonial readings of the book of Jeremiah which may help to clarify traditional difficult issues in Jeremianic studies (Vernyl 2011).

[9] The matter of Egypt being part of black Africa has been discussed by David Adamo several times (Adamo 2013:409-425; 2013:71-89; 2014:1-20).

scholars mentioned above have not thought it wise to take up Jeremiah's relationship with Africa and Africans. This absolute negligence is an example of the majority of Euro-American scholars' attitude toward the study of Africa and Africans in the Bible as a whole. This explains why this author takes it upon himself to examine the book of Jeremiah, especially where the prophet used the black colour of Africans proverbially as a source of valuation and not derogatorily.

The exegetical analysis of the text, the proper translation of Jeremiah 13:23 and the central theological message in an African context discussed below will further strengthen the fact that the prophet Jeremiah is not only familiar with black Africans, but held them in high esteem.

EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE TEXT

This analysis will only cover Chapter 13, which contains the text (13:23) that is of central concern of this paper. This is the concern of the prophet Jeremiah using Africans' (*cush*) black skin colour as valuation for the people of ancient Israel.[10]

It has been shown that large portions of prophetic discourse were in poetic form and not prose. The prophet Amos, for example, crafted large parts of his oracles and other utterances in poetry (Lundbom 2010). The prophet Jeremiah began his book with poetry and ended it with poetry, thus evenly distributed his poetry and prose (Lundbom 2010:160). It is also known that Jeremiah's oracles, confessions, laments, doxologies, prayers, wisdom sayings and other utterances are also carefully crafted in poetry (Lundbom 2010:161).

Chapter 13 contains five sections (13:1-11; 12-14; 15-17; 18-19; 20-27) with no common theme, except that they are all somewhat pessimistic in tone. This chapter seems to come from the latter part of Jehoiakim's reign. This seems to reflect the way in which the entire book is structured which makes it difficult to follow since the entire book was not in chronological order. For example, the so-called temple sermons

[10] More will be discussed below about the use of Africa and Africans by the prophet Jeremiah.

are in chapters 7 and 26 while the event that precedes it does not appear until chapter 36. This may be as a random decision of the editor to arrange the events thematically instead of in a linear sequence (Matthews 2012:141). Since v. 23 belongs to this chapter, it is important to deal with the entire chapter briefly.

Chapter 13:1-11 starts with a prose account of an acted out parable in the form of a symbolic oracle act (vv. 1-7). It is then followed by a prophetic oracle (8-11) that can be titled "The linen loincloth".[11] Verses 8-11 contain an announcement in the form of a prophetic oracle and the significance of the symbolic act.

The message of the prophet Jeremiah passed on to the public in the form of a public discourse or rhetorical discourse. The acted out parable is deliberately used for many reasons: (1) the symbolic act is an intensified declaration of the divine word; (2) it is very illustrative and extensive; and (3) it prefigured or pictured what was about to take place and also "propelled it toward actualisation because it is charged with power or force" (Matthews 2012:150-151). This symbolic act played a major role in Jeremianic declaration (Jr 13; 16; 19; 27; 28; 32; 43; 51) of which Chapter 13 was the first one. Yahweh commanded the prophet Jeremiah to buy a linen waistcloth and put it on his loins. He was instructed not to allow it to come into contact with water. After his obedience another directive came to him to take the loincloth and conceal it in the hole of the rock on the Euphrates.[12] The third directive was to go back and retrieve the loincloth. When he got the loincloth he discovered that it was spoiled and good for nothing. The loincloth symbolises Israel and the spoiling of the loincloth is the destruction of Judah.

Animated storytelling which is commonly used in the biblical world is certainly a

[11] Old Testament prophets sometimes used symbolic acts to drive home their message, for example I Kings 11:20ff.; Isaiah 20:1ff.; Ezekiel 4-5; 12. The people of ancient Israel were familiar with this method because they were used in law, medicine, and worship (Green 1971:20). Some rabbinic authorities place the book of Jeremiah as the first of the prophets instead of the book of Isaiah. The book of Lamentations which is usually ascribed to the prophet Jeremiah follows. Many traditions include the apocryphal books of Baruch and the Epistle of Jeremiah in their canon (Petersen 1998:95-128).

[12] The loincloth was the principal ornament in oriental life and highly prized and always worn (Green 1971:85).

developed art (Matthews 2012:150).[13] Jeremiah made effective use of physical acts, symbolic gestures and street theatre. The prophet Jeremiah demonstrates his theatrical skills while drawing from his knowledge of proverbs, custom and traditions to present his message. Each prophetic performance portrays a sense of urgency as well as a graphic enactment of the events to come.

As insiders, the original audience would have a better grasp of Jeremiah's message than do modern readers (Matthews 2012:150). They would have a better understanding of the prophet's actions, physical props, and symbolic gestures. These enacted prophecies are designed to convey a message without too much explanation to capture the imagination.

The prophet Jeremiah and his people therefore believed that the declared Word of God was a mysterious entity which would always fulfil itself in the outward embodiment of events. This proclamation eventually determined the shape of things to come. There was in ancient Israel the prophetic symbolic action which excited awe and fear in the minds of the hearers. Without doubt, the prophets worked with the ancient quasi-magical conception of the Word of God as an unquenchable independent energy which must produce effects that is proper to it. The prophetic oracle and symbolic actions may enrage and terrify, yet it carried the authority of mysterious powers enhanced by the formidable aspect of the character of Yahweh as understood by the prophets and the people. They produced the effect of putting in motion what they are meant to symbolise (Hyatt 1956:923). From the above, it is not necessary to think that the present symbolic actions of Jeremiah was not real and nonsensical, and therefore impossible. It should not be considered dramatic illustrations calculated only to attract and capture the imagination and fancy of the people.

Though many scholars accept the genuineness of Chapters 1-11, there are two things they usually disagree on. Scholars have pointed out some difficulties in accepting the symbolic acts not only as those of Jeremiah, but also as an actual historical performance or the journey of the mind. The first problem is the distance from Judah to Euphrates since Euphrates is about 400 miles from Judah (Hyatt

[13] Matthews (2012:150). This system is also common in African indigenous story telling.

1956:921). It would have been impossible for the prophet to actually walk it twice. The main difficulty is what meaning such a trip would have for the people of Judah (Hyatt 1956:921). Several suggestions have been given. One is that the parable is a spoken parable or vision experience (Hyatt 1956:921). Others think that the place Jeremiah went was not really the Euphrates River but a small town named Parah, the modern Khirbet el-Farah mentioned in Joshua 18:23 (Kidner 1987:63-66).

Behind the symbolic actions and the prophetic oracles is a very long tradition of Semitic divination and magic as a formative element informing the consciousness of the prophets and the people. This type of symbolic action and prophetic oracle, divination and magic is not only peculiar with the Semitic people but also with African (black) people whom the prophet is very familiar with. It is more ingrained as a way of life among black Africans.

The term "Euphrates" should also be taken literally because it is a journey with special mysterious power and special energy by the prophet Jeremiah. In all probability, Jeremiah made the trip to the Euphrates with the special aid of the divine power – mysterious power from Yahweh.

Verse 11 which is the application of one of the details of the parable is considered a Deuteronomic addition due to its vocabulary, such as "cleave " in Deuteronomy 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; 30:20; Joshua 22:5; 23:8; 2 Kings 18:6. The Deuteronomistic-like words in this verse bear the mark of Deuteronomic latter edition of Jeremiah (Carroll 2008:201-202).

Chapter 13:12-14 is the second division of this chapter. It is the second parable in prose. The prophet Jeremiah takes a popular proverb or portion of a drinking song and uses it for his message. What appears to be the setting of the message was probably a sacrificial feast where considerable drinking is taking place and some talking back in the preaching situation (Green 1971:87). The prophet Jeremiah also spoke in prose not only when they were in normal conversation but also when they were delivering oracles or making other utterances commensurate with their office (Lundbom 2010:161).[14] Unfortunately, the portions of the book of Jeremiah where there was a

[14] It has not been generally recognized because prose materials in the prophetic books have

significant amount of the prophet's discourse in prose were lumped together with contextual narrative and called "sermonic prose" (Green 1971:87).

Chapter 13:15-17 is an appeal to give up pride. This is an example of a common characteristic of Hebrew to switch quickly and comfortably from prose to poetry (Green 1971:87). The poem is marked with a different tone from the preceding pronouncement (Hyatt 1956:924). This type of switch is very common in the Old Testament when approaching a climax or when deeply moved by the author or composer. The author pleads with a great ethos and power with his audience to change from their arrogance to humility and compares his audience to travellers caught in a storm in the mountains. The historical setting of this message is probably during the first deportation of some important people in Judah (598/597).

The fourth section, Jeremiah 13:18-19, graphically described the degradation and deportation to Babylon. This is another great moving poetic prophecy addressed to the King of Judah, Jehoiachin, and his mother Nehuishta in 597 B.C.E. to accept their fate in humility because there is no solution to exile. Verse 19 was a great prophetic hyperbole and should not be taken literally (Green 2010:88).

Chapter 13:20-27 is the fifth and last division in Chapter 13 and deals with the shame of Jerusalem. In this section is a vivid personification of Jerusalem as a woman. LXX adds the word "Jerusalem" after "your eyes" in verse 20, probably because the Hebrew text used by the LXX has Jerusalem or it was added by the translators (Hyatt 1956:927). This section is one of the passages where the prophet Jeremiah employs what Kalmanofsky calls "rhetoric of horror" which manifests itself in "a horror corpus" to deliver his message (e.g., Jr 4:5-6:30; 8:1-23; 13:15-27) (Kalmanofsky 2008:1-30). The history of Judah is full of false hope from Babylon and African (Egypt) during the time of Jehoiakin, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. The prophet who is very familiar with these people and was sure that such will not come from the two powers but instead they will come and dominate Judah. Such domination will bring extreme pain like the pain of a woman in labour (Jr 4:31; 6:24; 22:23; 30:6, 48:41; 49:22, 24; 50:43). According to the prophet this is as a result of habitual sin. This

always been said to be second hand material and not the *ipsissima verba* of the prophet.

section contains the verse (v. 23) that concerns this paper but more detail and concentration will be in the next section of this paper.

Verses 22 and 26 are Jeremiah's use of euphemism (Lundbom 2010:184) as an example of "language at a stretch". Jeremiah 13:22 says, "For your great sin, your skirts were exposed; your heels were violated," and chapter 13:26 says "your disgrace was seen".

Verses 23-24 is considered a misplaced passages which should have come after verse 27. Verse 23 contains a penetrating and pictorial portrayal of the power of evil. Using sexual imagery Judah will be ripped and raped (Longman 2012:50). He was blunt in describing their sin and uses well known metaphors to describe Judah's inherent tendency to sin, that is, the skin colour of the black people and leopard spots in Jeremiah 13:23 (Forman 2011:150). It has become their nature as black skin is natural to Africans (Cush and Egypt) as spots are to leopards (Jr 13:23) and as such they will not want to change it. Judah is stubborn in their sin and they shall be scattered as chaff is scattered (Longman 2012:50). A close examination of various translations of Jeremiah 13:23 are important before considering the central theological concept of this passage.

Why use the black skin of Africans for the vivid description of Judah's character? One of the major reasons is that African blacks were well known, common, powerful and respected in ancient times. From time immemorial Africa has been a place of refuge for people running for safety. As early as 3000 B.C.E. the Mesopotamian traded in gold dust with Africans (Cush/Egypt, Adamo 2006:57-59). Abraham went to Africa for safety (Gn 12). Joseph and Jacob also went to Africa for safety (Gn 43:1). Perhaps the Hebrews would have not survived if not because they ran to Africa. During the twenty-first dynasty of Egypt, Hadad the Edomite prince ran to Africa for safety when David conquered Edom (1 Kgs 11:18-22). Jeroboam also ran to Africa for safety during the reign of Solomon (1 Kgs 11). During the destruction of the northern kingdom (587/86 B.C.E.), the remnants escaped to Africa for safety. When the fanatical Jews murdered Gedelaiah they ran to Africa for safety fearing that the Babylonians might retaliate. The prophet Jeremiah himself was taken to Africa for

safety where he continued to prophesy until his death. Up to the time of the New Testament the tradition continued and that was why Jesus was taken to Africa for refuge. It must be the power of Africans that made them run there because Africa once dominated the ancient Near East (Steindorff 1942).

The implication of the above is that the colour consciousness of the ancient authors of biblical texts was never a political or ideological basis to enslave, oppress or demean other people (Snowden 1983:14-17). The biblical text contains no narratives in which the original intention was to negate the full humanity of black people or view blacks in an unfavourable way. Such attitudes to blacks are indeed postbiblical (Gier 1989:42-52).

Translating Jeremiah 13:23 and the central theological message

היהפך כושׁי עורו ונמר חברברתיו גם־אתם תוכלו להיטיב למדי הרע

- King James Version (KJV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), New International Version (NIV), New American Standard Bible (NASV), and New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), have almost the same translation:
  "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spot? Then may you also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (KJV).
- RSV is the same as above with **"who"** instead of "**that**".
- NIV differs only by the words "**Neither"** and "**can"** and "**doing" –** "Neither can you do good who are accustomed to **doing** evil".
- NASB differs by only the absence of "**may"** –"you also can do good Who are accustomed to do evil".
- However, NRSV translation is a little bit different from the above translations: "Can Ethiopians change their skin or leopards their spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil." The translation is still the same except **Ethiopians** and **leopards** are pluralised.
- *The African American Jubilee Edition of the Holy Bible* translates Jeremiah 13:23 in radically different way from all the translations above:
  "Can you ever change and do what's right? Can people change the color of their

skin

Or can a leopard remove its spots? If so then you can change and learn to do right."

It is quite strange and absurd that the *The African American Jubilee Edition Holy Bible* by black scholars gave the strangest translation by totally eliminating an important word *Cush* which was translated "Ethiopia" in the rest of the above translations. Since the most contentious word in the above translations is the translation of the Hebrew word *Cush* to Ethiopia it is also important to consider the meaning and the usage of words *Cush* and *Aithiop* in the Old Testament writers, the Egyptians, Assyrians and the Greeks. I believe that this will assist this author to arrive at the most appropriate translation and the meaning of Jeremiah 13:23.

The most unfortunate thing is that all the translations of this passage (Jr 13:23) into the two major Nigerian languages (Yoruba and Ibo) follow the KJV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NIV translation verbatim by translating *Cushi* as "Ethiopia:"

*"Ara **Etiopia** le yi awo re pada, tabi ekun le yi ila ara re pada? Beni eyin pelu iba lese rere, eyin ti a ko ni iwa buburu" (Yoruba).*

*Onye **Etiopia**, o gabanwe akpukpo-aruya? Ma –obu agu, o gabanwe agwa- ya? O buru out a unu onwe-unu puru kwa ime ezi ihe, bu ndi emere ka unu muta ime ihe ojo.*

That tells the extent to which the English translations above have misled the world.

Cush

Who were the Cushites in the Old Testament? Of course, it will be incorrect to pretend that there were no disputes concerning the identification of *Cush*/Cushites, their location and how the biblical authors or editors saw them.

It appears that the first people to use the word *Cush* were the ancient Egyptians. The term *Cush*, like the term "Africa", was originally used by the ancient Egyptians to refer to a very limited area of land or tribe beyond Semna and Kerma, and was later extended to include all the lands further south (Maspero 1968:488).

Lepsius says that the Kushites who lived in the land south of *Wawat* originally

came from Asia between the time of Pepi I (2000 B.C.E.) and Amenemhat I (1700 B.C.E.), and drove back the Africans who occupied the place (Maspero 1968:488 cited Lepsius). J. D. Baldwin maintains that the Kushites originated from Arabia and built settlements throughout Africa, down to the eastern coast, nearly to the Cape of Good Hope (Baldwin n.d.:245). Lepsius' idea has been rejected by several eminent scholars because a comparative study of the names which appear in the inscription of Una with the names which appear in the later monuments indicates that there has been no change in the population of this area (Maspero 1968:488). Baldwin's theory of the origin of the Cushite people appears unlikely in the light of the fact that the oldest human skeletal remains were found in black Africa. Furthermore, the ancient records of the Egyptians, although sometimes vague, always point to the south of Egypt when referring to *Cush.* Although there is yet no certainty as to the exact geographical limit of the kingdom of *Cush*, "the brick castle and the great tumuli" uncovered during the excavation at Kerme on the east bank above the Third Cataract, is evidence that "the seat of the kings of *Kush*" was there and became the place from where the whole "kingdom of *Kush*" was ruled at least from the seventeenth and early sixteenth centuries B.C.E. (Kemp 1983:100).

There are many Egyptian monuments which maintain that the Egyptian people had expeditions to the land of *Cush* as early as the sixth dynasty, under Pepi II. These include the inscriptions of Ameni, Carnarvon Tablet I, the Annals of Thutmose III, the Kuban Stela, the wall of the temple of Redesiay, the stelae of Aezanaa and others (Breasted 1906:251).

The Assyrian records relating to Africa and Africans are mainly of military encounters calling them *Cush/Cusu*. They are the annalistic texts of Esarhaddon, the Dog River Stele, the Senjirli stele, the Alabaster Tablets, the Rasam Cylinder of Ashurbanipal and others (Pritchard 1969:232).

Perhaps one would be right to say that the term *Cush* passed from Egypt in Africa to the Assyrians and to the Hebrews. This term is used very frequently and extensively. It is used in the Old Testament to cover a wide area corresponding to

Ethiopia of the classical period.[15] The term *Cush* with its generic appears about 57 times in the Old Testament (Oswalt 1980:435). Only a brief summary of its use in the Old Testament will be given.

In the Old Testament, *Cush* and *Cushite*s are used to refer to Africa and Africans in terms of a particular geographical location, and as names of persons who came from Africa or whose ancestors are of African origin (Adamo 2005:13-17). In terms of a geographical location, it is described as the extreme part of the world (Ez 29:10, cf. Is 45:14, Job 28:19). The inhabitants of *Cush* were described as tall and smooth-skinned people. Their blackness became proverbial (Is 18:2, Jr 13:23). Moses' wife was from *Cush* (Nm 12:15). A Cushite man reported the death of Absalom to David (2 Sm 18:21, 31-33). Ebed-Melech, the Cushite who was in the palace of King Zedekiah, rescued the prophet Jeremiah from death (Jr 38:6-14; 39:16-18). Their power was comparable only to the power of the Assyrians. Judah depended on them and the Egyptians for deliverance from the hand of the terrible Assyrians (2 Ch 12:3-9, Is 18:2, 1 Kgs 18:19-21, 2 Ch 32:9-15; 3:8). However, despite the mighty power of the Cushites, they experienced defeat during Zerah and Asa's encounter (2 Ch 14:9-15) and the encounter with the Assyrians (2 Kgs 18:21). *Cush*, like any other nation, was also subjected to God's judgment (Ez 30:4). The prophet Zephaniah prophesied the conversion of the Cushites who would bring tribute to Yahweh (Zp 3:10). They would stretch their hands to God (Ps 68:31). They would be one of the nations who will acknowledge Zion as their spiritual home (Ps 87:4-5).

Aithiop

A close examination of the origin and meaning of the word "Ethiopia" shows that the translation of the word *cush* as Ethiopia is misleading and unfortunate. Scholars owe the origin and the development of the name "Ethiopia" to the ancient Greek writers. The first appearance of the word Ethiopia was in the fragment tablets uncovered in the palace of Nestor at Pylos. This name was accompanied by frescoes depicting blacks with the word *ai-t-jo-go* (translated as *aithiops*) appearing several times (Hansberry

[15] Not Ethiopia of today.

1977:5). This earliest appearance dated back to the second half of the thirteen century B.C.E. (Hansberry 1977:5; Adamo 2005:31). Aeschylus is the first Greek writers to place Ethiopia definitely in Africa when he referred to the dark race as Ethiopians who dwell near Ethiopian river (Nile), the spring of the sun where the river is located.

One of the classical writers says that *Aethiops* which means "glowing or black" was the original name of Zeus as he was worshipped in the Island of Chios (Adamo 205:32; Snowden 1983:7). Scholars' consensus is that the word Ethiopia originated from the Greeks to designate black African people both at home and abroad in terms of the colour of their skins. This term which the ancient Greek geographers generally used to refer to any member of the black race was derived from the words "burnt" and "faces" (Adamo 2005:32; Snowden 1983:7). Ethiopia therefore, literarily means "burnt-faced person" of Africa and African diaspora during the classical period. This name for African people was probably chosen by the Greeks to describe African people based on their environmental theory that the dark colour of their skins and the woolly or coiled hair of their heads were as a result of the intense heat of the southern sun (Snowden 1983:7; Herodotus 2.22). But in modern times, Ethiopia refers to a small country in Africa and not as the classical Greeks understands it. The translation of word *Cush* to Ethiopia by the KJV, NKJV, RSV, NIV and NASB is indeed misleading as stated above. It has led the entire Christian world to think that it is only the people of that small country called "Ethiopia" that are the only part of Africa that contributed to the drama of redemption. Alfred Dunston's observation is correct when he says:

> This term 'Ethiopia' in the English Bible has misled the Christian world for the past three hundred-sixty-odd years, and it is highly conceivable that a more proper or an English term identification of the Cushite might have changed the whole European attitude towards the chattel slavery or black people. The myths of savagery, cannibalism, and general debasement would have been re-examined had the Bible reflected the fact that the people under the myths being called 'Negroes' in the Western world. The color and geography of the Cushites would have contributed to a better appreciation

> all around, and the most ignorant, rabid racist would not have pretended to doubt the existence of a soul in any man about whom he had read in the pages of the Holy Bible (Dunston 1974:20-21).

Certainly, this translation of the word *Cush* as Ethiopia is most unfortunate because it has misled the entire world. The translation does not have the exact meaning of the people referred to as *Cush* (blacks Africans). In Modern Hebrew the word *Cush* still means "black". What this writer thinks should be the best translation should be "black African".[16] This is not likely to be misunderstood by the English readers of the Bible. The term "black Africans" will be the most natural equivalent of the biblical term Cushites today. This term "Cushites" if translated to "Black Africans" will also convey the correct black identity of the people referred to as Cushites in the Old Testament (Adamo 2005:40). Such translation is not likely to be misunderstood as the word "Ethiopia".

Admittedly and at a glance, Jeremiah 13:23 looks as if the prophet Jeremiah had great prejudice against the Kushites because of the English translations. The temptation is for one to interpret it as such. Some Western exegetes who have deep prejudice against black African people will interpret it that way. For example, McKane sees the *Cushi* of I Samuel 18 as black African Negro slaves (McKane 1963:1143). Hammershaimb, Harper, Mays, Ullendorf, and others also think that the Kushites in Amos 9:7 were compared with Israelites because Israelites knew the

[16] Many scholars still erroneously believe that ancient Egyptians were not black people. Egyptians themselves, in the Inscription of Hashepsut made it clear that their ancestors originated from Cush. Many ancient and modern scholars maintain that Egypt is part of Africa and that Punt and *Nehesi* in ancient Africa were their places of origin and that the present location of Egypt was originally part of an ocean but Kushites inhabited the land (Adamo 1986:66). Ancient Egyptians themselves claimed that their place of origin is Punt. They also sent the Egyptians out as colonists (Sicilus 2005 reprint 3.11, 3.2-3.11; Adamo 1986:67). E. A. Budge, George Rawlinson, and Maspero were emphatic that the original home of the Egyptian ancestors was Punt which is to be sought in the African side of the gulf where the present side of Somaliland is located (Budge 1976:512-513; Rawlinson n.d:72; Maspero 1968:488; Adamo 1986:67; 2013:221-246; 2013:409-425). Egyptians were black people and the likelihood is that the Cushites mentioned in Jeremiah 13:23 includes the Egyptians who are black Africans.

Kushites who were dark-skinned and uncivilized people coming from a despised nation called Africa. According to them the children of Israel knew Cushites as slaves (Hammashaimb 1970:134; Mays1969:157; Ullendorf 1968:9; Harper 1915:192).

Jeremiah 13:23 has been the subject of debate as to the passage's positive or negative intention. Carroll calls this an argument charged with ideological matters, but he never indicates clearly what those ideologies are (Carroll 1986:139-140). Thompson also says, "a negative answer must be given" (Thompson 1980:374). None of these eminent commentators speaks about the unthinkable nature of the claim. They did not discuss why the example is chosen by Jeremiah. What appears to bring the negative interpretation of this passage is the stress of the use of "can" or "able" in the translation which does not really appear in Hebrew version of the passage. However, it is important to note that the Hebrew version uses an interrogative *he* together with the imperfect of יהפך as the verb in the first clause which is also understood in the second clause. Since there is no Hebrew word for "can" or "able" in both clauses, one will expect the interrogative *he* be translated "would" instead of "can". Baily thinks that the translation should then be: "Would the Cushites change their skin, or the leopard his spots? So also you who have learnt to do evil could do good" (Bailey 1991:165-184). Unfortunately this translation retain "Cushites" which is the transliteration of the Hebrew word *Cushi*. However, since the word *Cushi* means "black persons" from Africa, what should be the most appropriate translation is: "Would black Africans change their skin, or the leopards their spots? So also you who have learnt to do evil could do good." This translation is in full accord with the basis of Jeremiah charge, that is, that the people of Judah are learners of evil and that black Africans and the leopard have learnt the advantages of being who they are (rulers of territories, awesome to their neighbours with great respect from them). So also those who live the lives of sinning have learned the advantages of being sinners. To the prophet Jeremiah and his audience it is unthinkable that black Africans would want to change the way they look (Bailey 1991:165-184). The prophet was telling Judah to use black Africans as yardstick for assessing themselves or as Dunston puts it, "it proves beyond a doubt that Black Africans will desire to be white because it is unnatural" (Dunston,

1974:47).

In 13:23-24 the Greek version represents the verb as aorist *kai diespeira auvtou* which means that the destruction and the exile is an accomplished act. The relevance of this to the previous verse (v. 23) is that if a Black African would change the colour of his skin or the leopard its spots, then you (Judah) could change your ways. In other words, the condition laid down is almost an impossible one to fulfil. The actual meaning is that the bondage and the impossibility of relieving her slavery to which Judah has placed herself is actually expressed (McKane 1986:314). The question of Judah's habituation of sin which leads to slavery is irredeemable. Judah has an indelible stain and "her evil habits held her fast like bands of steel" (McKane 1986:314).

Jeremiah 13:23 is a disputation form of prophecy (Allen 2005:136). Two questions were first asked, and then followed by accusations. A negative answer is automatically expected to these questions. The main purpose of such strong expression is not to despise the skin colour of the African people, but to express very vividly that there is a deep-seated wickedness in Judah which has been ingrained into the blood of the people through several years of wickedness. As far as the prophet Jeremiah is concerned Judah will be punished, since wickedness has become part of their permanent nature (Jr 13:1-7). They will be scattered like chaff. This penetrating, pictorial portrayal of the power of habit (evil) means that, if it is possible for a black African to wash away the colour of his skin and the leopards their spots, then it would be possible for Judah to do good and then escape punishment. According to Newsome, this is the central theological concept of prophet Jeremiah (Newsome Jr 1984:9).

Beyond the permanency of her habit and the impossibility of redemption from slavery, is the meaning of the comparison. The purpose of that comparison is valuation. This is supported by other biblical passages in the Old Testament that use Africa and Africans as the basis for valuation of Israel. For example, the oracle of salvation in Deutero-Isaiah tries to convince the people of ancient Israel how much Yahweh loves them. In order to prove it Deutero-Isaiah said that Yahweh will ransom Israel with three powerful African nations, Egypt, Cush, and Sheba (Is 43:3). These

three powerful nations (black nations) used as ransom demonstrate Yahweh's deep love. It means that those black African nations must be of high value to Israel because Israel put their trust in them for protection against the Assyrians and Babylonians.

In Ps 68:31 black Africans, "Egypt and Cush", were listed as bringing gifts to and worshipping Yahweh. When this is done, it means that a high point of the worship of Yahweh would have been reached. That means true universalism of Yahweh's worship would have been achieved when these powerful nations whom Israel puts their trust in (Hs 7:11; Is 30:1-2; Is 31:1-3; Ez 29:16), would have accepted Yahweh. The reasons for using these black nations as standards against which to evaluate Israel are their vast territories, great military might and power, wealth and wisdom (Is 19:5, 11-15; 45:14; Ez 27:7; Dn 11:43). It causes their "high esteem to be boosted when these nations are cited as paradigmatic" (Bailey 1991:170).

In Isaiah 19:11-15 the African people and nations, Egypt and Cush, were used as a paradigm for destruction/punishment because of ancient Israel's heavy reliance on their wealth and wisdom and power. Scholars have mentioned the great similarities between Israelite wisdom and black African nations' wisdom (Egypt and Cush) (Crenshaw 1981; Mckane 1977:51; Murphy 1981:9-10; von Rad 1978:15, 26; Scott 1971: 23-47, 58-63; Bartholomew & O'Dowd 2011:32-40).

A careful examination of the Old Testament with reference to Kush and Kushites is enough to convince any honest and well-informed biblical scholars that there is not a single reference to Kushites (black Africans) as slaves. There is not a single place in the Hebrew Bible where the colour of their skins is at issue (Smith 1929:281; Green 1970:171; Rice 1975:97). According to Norman Snaith, "There is, of course, no slightest suggestion that the color of their skin is the point at issue; there is no warrant anywhere in the Bible for that kind of idea" (Snaith 1956:49).

A very careful examination of the entire book of the prophet Jeremiah shows that he is very familiar with the Cushites (Africans) more than any other biblical prophet. While the prophet Isaiah mentions the Africans six times, Ezekiel three times, Amos once, Zephaniah three times, Jeremiah mentioned them favourably and positively seven times. The prophet Jeremiah mentions the Cushites and Egyptians 68 times.

In Jeremiah 13:23 he refers to the idea that the blackness of an African people is a permanent and favourite colour which he will never try to change. Therefore, Israel's evil habit is permanent.

The fourth section, Jeremiah 13:18-19, as already discussed above in the section of analysis, graphically described the degradation and deportation to Babylon. This is another great moving poetic prophecy addressed to the king of Judah, Jehoiachin, and his mother, Nehuishta in 597 B.C.E. to accept their fate in humility because there is no solution to exile. Verse 19 was a great prophetic hyperbole and should not be taken literally (Green 2010:88).

CONCLUSION

From the above, one can appreciate all the frantic efforts of Jeremianic scholars to understand both the person of Jeremiah and his book. The many shifts in the historical events during the period of Jeremiah's ministry possibly affected the many shifts in literary style and perspective throughout the book of Jeremiah. It also suggests that prior to its final redaction by the biblical editors its composition may have been the combined effort of the prophet Jeremiah and his friend and scribe, Baruch (Matthews 2012:143). The above discussion on the state of Jeremianic studies also shows that much energy has been spent on understanding the book of Jeremiah, especially the controversy surrounding the author, the structure, composition, theology, Deuteronomistic edition, the Hebrew and the Greek edition, and the negative feminine imagery in the book. However, very little attention has been given to the person of Jeremiah, especially his knowledge of, relationship with and respect for Africans.

The continuous identification of the people of African descent as "*Cush*" is an important way of identifying those of African ancestry by describing them according to the colour of their skin. It possibly shows the appreciation of Africans. If the word "*Cush*" in Modern Hebrew still means black one will be correct to translate "Cushites" as black Africans in Jeremiah 13:23.[17]

[17] This author visited Israel in 1981 for an archaeological dig and was the only black person

My examination of the biblical texts which mention Africans (Cushites) has shown that the ancient biblical world was not prejudice against black people. Prejudice against people with black skin colour is certainly post-biblical and alien to ancient Israel. Africans/Cushites were never racialised by the authors of the Bible (Sandler Jr. 2006:401). I have demonstrated in this article that the author/s of the book of Jeremiah, particularly 13:23, and the entire Old Testament, did not despise the people called "Cushites" in a manner consistent with a racialist paradigm of modern society. Instead they were viewed as people who are faithful *ebed-melech* (Jr 38:6-14; 39:16-18), reliable (*tirhakah*), and people worthy of great esteem (Sandler Jr 2006:401; Matthews 2012:143; Carroll 1984; 1989; 2008; Thompson 1980, Bright 1965; Holladay 1989; McKane 1986; Jones 1992; King 1993) .

The use of black Africa as valuation for Israelite actions demonstrates the great value attached to black Africans during the biblical period. The frequent mentioning of Cushites and Egyptians demonstrates the deep knowledge, familiarity and respect the biblical people and the ancient people in general had about and for them.

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on the team from Baylor University, Waco, Texas, USA. Israeli boys and girls pointed at me and said, "Cush, Cush."

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