

# Slavery in the ancient times



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Slavery in the Ancient Times. Use examples to explain the process of how the myth of Ham moved from the Jewish world and arrived in the Muslim world. How did West Africa slaves become the final sons of Ham to European Christians? What is the relationship between religion, slavery, and racism in the context of Jewish, Christian and Muslim society? How did the sons of Ham finally become West African Slaves of the Europeans? Do you think religion will serve economic and political interest in today's world? Use current examples of the role of religion in today's society to answer this question.

The beginning of the myth of Ham can be found in the Jewish scriptures of the Old Testament. He was one of the three sons of Noah, and he just happened to see his father drunk and naked. When Noah realized what had happened he cursed Ham and his descendants. This is recorded in Genesis 9: 18. The Bible tells how the sons of Noah spread out in what is now the Middle East, and founded the modern peoples that we know today. As a result of this curse, Ham was forever regarded as being inferior to his two brothers, and this curse was passed on to future generations: " God shall enlarge Japheth and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant." (Genesis, 9: 27, King James Version of the Bible). There is no mention of the color of anyone's skin in this story, but when Jewish scholars taught the scriptures, they tended to add meanings to the basic narrative, increasingly linking the descendants of Shem with Jews (Semites) and early Arabs in the area to the East, the descendants of Japheth with Europeans to the north and west, and the descendants of Ham with Africans to the south and west. Unfortunately there was some confusion about the meaning of some words in the passing down of these stories, and Goldenberg reports that the word Ham became associated with the the word for the color black.

It was due to a scribal error that Ham/slavery/blackness became so closely linked in ancient times. There is historical evidence that “ there were trade contacts, including a Black slave trade between Arabia and East Africa from the earliest centuries of the Common era.” (Goldenberg, 2003, p. 196) By the time of Islam, most black people in the Middle East were slaves. So it is that the original mistaken links from holy books, were reinforced by what people saw in real life. Islamic peoples also began to make use of these dark skinned African people as slaves. Once again in early modern times, when the industrial revolution and the colonial era began, these false but enduring errors continued. White slave traders justified their business by referring to the Biblical texts and so religion was used to support their immoral position. This shows a repeating pattern. Religious texts do not in themselves contain the ideas about slavery and racism, but later generations twist the meanings, sometimes in error, and sometimes deliberately, to make their goals seem right. We see examples of this today in America’s “ war on terror” which demonizes Muslims, and in the continuing exploitation of sub Saharan Africa by rich countries in the Northern Hemisphere, including Europe, America and some of the rich oil states. This is nothing different than institutionalized slavery on a global scale. The tendency to draw these lines along racial grounds is explained by the fact that it is easier to hate people who are different from yourself. Jews, Christians and Arab Muslims alike have fallen into this trap when it was convenient for them to make profits from people who look different. References Goldenberg, David M. The Curse of Ham: race and slavery in early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.