

## No Color Line in Heaven

Jerry A. Stevens, May 10, 2014

Have you ever wondered whether racial distinctions marked by skin color here on Earth will be preserved in Heaven? And then, what about Jesus Himself? Will He appear as an olive-complexioned Jew (most likely how He looked when He lived on Earth) or what? Actually, Ellen G. White used various descriptive expressions such as “pale” (ST, 3/23/1876; RH, 4/17/1894); “pale face” (5Red 23, 42, 59; 3SP 103, 123, 139; ST, 8/14/1879; ST, 8/21/1879; BEcho, 8/1/1892; SJ 117, 129); “His face was pale” (1SG 59; 3SP 31; EW 176; DA 594); “pale, worn countenance” (5Red; 83SP 87); “pale and blood-stained face” (5Red 21; 3SP 101; ST, 8/21/1879; BEcho, 8/15/1892); “pale countenance” (5Red 39; 3SP 120; DA 707); “pale Sufferer” (5Red 633; SP 143); “pale, suffering face” (DA 713); “pale with suffering” (RH, 12/26/1899; 19MR 168); “pale, sad face” (5Red 55; 3SP 136); “pale, worn face” (SJ 50); “calm, pale face” (DA 715); “face . . . pale and serene” (5Red 73; 3SP 153; SJ 141); “pale cheeks” (PH169 4; 2T 204); “face was pale and haggard” (5Red 44; RH, 10/9/1888). My eleventh edition of *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* (2003) defines *pale* as “deficiency of color or intensity of color: pallid.” In all fairness, we would be well advised to make no judgment here as to Jesus’ usual complexion prior to the extremely stressful closing scenes of His ministry, which is the period described in all of the above examples, and which would make any person’s skin take on an unnatural pallor. Emotional stress, including grief, is known by medical science to be a causative factor, which would certainly apply to Jesus in this instance.

But what about dictionary definitions in use during the lifetime of Mrs. White—might they have differed significantly? If one consults Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), the definition is stated this way: “White or whitish; wan; deficient in color; not ruddy or fresh of color; as a pale face or skin; pale cheeks.” Then again, *Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary* (1913) defines it similarly: “Wanting in color; not ruddy; dusky white; pallid; wan; as, a pale face.” Neither description seems to describe a typical-looking Levantine Jew, though it might be conceded that Jesus’ complexion was paler than normal but still Semitic. Nor would it be particularly appropriate here to depict Christ’s face as it appeared when supernaturally illuminated, such as on the mount of transfiguration, though the change must have been both dramatic and a blinding white.

In Baptist minister Clare Herbert Woolston’s familiar song lyrics of “Jesus Loves the Little Children,” these memorable lines emerge:

Jesus loves the little children,  
All the children of the world.  
Red and yellow, black and white,  
They are precious in His sight.  
Jesus loves the little children of the world.

Today I came across a statement by Ellen G. White that I had not read before: “In Heaven there will be no color line; for all will be as white as Christ Himself” (GH, March 1901). *The Gospel Herald* article’s statement does not appear anywhere else in her writings. An interesting sidebar to this article is the fact that her son James Edson White edited the

paper, which was “the organ of the Southern Missionary Society, promoting and reporting missionary work among the Black people in the South” (SDAEn 10:621, s.v. *Gospel Herald* [1]). This helps explain the context of our quoted statement.

Many artists have attempted to portray both Jesus and earthlings translated to Heaven in various skin hues. It now appears to this researcher that Jesus will level the playing field once and for eternity. And, fear not, there we shall have no trouble picking out loved ones by race or skin color: “We shall know our friends”; “in the glorified body their identity will be perfectly preserved. Then shall we know even as also we are known. 1 Cor. 13:12. In the face radiant with the light shining from the face of Jesus, we shall recognize the lineaments of those we love” (DA 804).

Not to complicate the picture, but we must mention that “as Adam came forth from the hand of his Creator” “his complexion was neither white nor sallow, but ruddy, glowing with the rich tint of health” (3SG 34). Evidently, Adam’s original ruddiness will fade into whiteness, along with the rest of us; but this certainly does not imply that we will experience anything but perfect, immortal health. The Sweet Singer of Israel could not have imagined long ago that there would be a future physical dimension to the answer to his plea when he prayed: “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7)!

Think about it. In the beginning, God did not create multiple races. Rather, the origin and destiny of mankind is explained this way:

“Noah . . . said, Cursed be Canaan [Ham’s son; see Gen. 9:22]; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren” (Gen. 9:25). Ellen White further comments that “the curse that followed [Ham’s] sin” of being debased by the use of wine “has never been lifted from his descendants” (ST, March 19, 1902).

By sharp contrast, Noah goes on to pronounce a blessing on his two other sons. “And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant” (vv. 26, 27).

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 117, Ellen White picks up the thread of Noah’s prophecy and weaves it into the fabric of unfolding human history.

In Shem, Ham, and Japheth, who were to be the founders of the human race, was foreshadowed the character of their posterity.

Noah, speaking by divine inspiration, foretold the history of the three great races to spring from these fathers of mankind.

As she continues relating the outcome of Noah’s prophecy, Mrs. White writes, “For a time the descendants of Noah continued to dwell among the mountains where the ark had rested. As their numbers increased, apostasy soon led to division” (p. 118). Then follows the tragic account of the tower of Babel fiasco in the plain of Shinar, on the banks of the river Euphrates. And what was the result? “After the dispersion from Babel[,] idolatry again became well-nigh universal, and the Lord finally left the hardened transgressors to follow their evil ways, while He chose Abraham, of the line of Shem, and made him the keeper of His law for future generations” (p. 125). The dispersion from the tower of Babel obviously involved much more than God merely confounding the idolators’

language, for “the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the Earth” (Gen. 11:8).

Let us briefly comment on “the three great races” of mankind.

- Ham, the progenitor of the Hamitic race, begot descendants that belong to the African and Arabian Cushites (Ethiopians), the Egyptians, and the Canaanites, whose non-Semitic linguistic family includes such Afro-Asiatic languages as Berber, Egyptian, and Cushitic (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*). Their skin color tends to be very dark or black.
- Shem, as the derivation of his name implies, was the progenitor of the Semitic race: Babylonians, Assyrians, Arameans, Arabs, Hebrews, and possibly the Sumerians (SDADic 1021), whose language family is defined as Afro-Asiatic (Webster). Their skin color tends to be medium dark or brown.
- Japheth became the progenitor of such Japhetic peoples as “the Medes, Ionians, and several nations who in OT times lived in what is now Asia Minor and southern Russia” (SDADic 551), who speak Indo-European languages in Europe and western Asia (Merriam-Webster Online), and who tend to have light-colored skin.

Regardless of geographical location, skin color, or language, let us rejoice that in Heaven, at last, God’s original purpose will be restored. In the home of the redeemed there will be no color line but instead a single human race and, as a happy side benefit, one universal language as well. The language of Heaven will not require a Berlitz or Rosetta Stone course in order to master it. In fact, Mrs. White says, “You may never have learned the different languages of this Earth, but God will teach you the language of Heaven” (GCDB, March 30, 1903), for it becomes redeemed earthlings’ “country of their adoption” (Ltr 281, Oct. 10, 1905, in UL 297).