

Introduction

The story in Acts 8:26–40, which occupies what could be a pivotal point in the middle of the first half of the Acts of the Apostles, narrates the baptism of a unique character introduced in 8:27 as “an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians” (ἄνῆρ Αἰθίοψ εὐνοῦχος δυνάστης Κανδάκης βασιλίσσης Αἰθιοπῶν). What first drew me to this character was *difference*. I am interested in how Christian communities negotiate difference, especially as it relates to admission into and participation in the life of the community. Here is a biblical character who seems to embody multiple differences—of class, race, and gender, and possibly of religion and sexuality as well. What has sustained my interest in the Ethiopian eunuch, however, is *ambiguity*. Each time I attempted to define a particular difference he might embody, I discovered ambiguity. He might be different in terms of class, race, and gender, but what exactly are his class, race, and gender? I am not the first interpreter to have noticed these ambiguities. In a commentary on Acts published in 1997, F. Scott Spencer noted, “Comprehensive examination of the Ethiopian traveller’s place in ancient society in relation to standard categories of race, class, and gender uncovers a fascinating, multifaceted character who defies easy classification.”¹ In a 1999 dissertation, Cottrel R. Carson stated even more emphatically, “In many respects, the Ethiopian eunuch defies categorization. . . . His lack of definition is extreme.”² How is an interpreter to deal with such ambiguities in a biblical character? In order to address this question, it is useful first to examine how actual interpreters have read the eunuch’s identity in terms of religion, class, race, gender, and sexuality.

RELIGION

The question of the Ethiopian eunuch’s religious identity has occupied a preeminent place in the history of the interpretation of Acts 8:26–40. Pontius (died c. 260³), a deacon in Carthage, read the Ethiopian eunuch as a Jew.⁴ This

1. F. Scott Spencer, *Acts, Readings: A New Biblical Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 91.

2. Cottrel R. Carson, “Do You Understand What You Are Reading?’ A Reading of the Ethiopian Eunuch Story (Acts 8.26–40) from a Site of Cultural Marronage” (Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1999), 145.

3. All dates are Common Era unless otherwise noted.

view seems to have been shared by Irenaeus (c. 130–202), bishop of Lyons, who applied the following heading to the stories in Acts *following* the story of the Ethiopian eunuch: “Conversion is more difficult with gentiles than with Jews.”⁵ Eusebius (c. 275–339), bishop of Caesarea, on the other hand, identified the Ethiopian eunuch as the first convert among the gentiles.⁶ Similarly, Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373), a deacon, concluded that the eunuch must have been a gentile since he was an Ethiopian.⁷ Finally, the scholar and translator Jerome (c. 347–420) seems to have read the eunuch as occupying an intermediate position between Jew and gentile, referring to him both as “prefiguring the gentiles” (*gentium populos praefigurans*)⁸ and as a “lover of divine knowledge” (*amor divinae scientiae*).⁹

In subsequent centuries, the Ethiopian eunuch continued to be identified as a gentile by Bede (c. 672–735), a Benedictine monk in England; Nicephorus Callistus (c. 1256–1335), a Byzantine historian; Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1270–1349), a Franciscan scholar; and Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German reformer.¹⁰ At the same time, the eunuch continued to be read as occupying an intermediate position between Jew and gentile. John Calvin (1509–1564), a Genevan reformer, included the eunuch among “the many transferring in droves to the Jewish religion,”¹¹ and Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626), Anglican bishop of Chichester, counted him among the “proselytes, that is, half Jews.”¹² Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), a Dutch jurist and theologian; Matthew Henry (1662–1714), a Presbyterian minister; and John Wesley (1703–1791), an Anglican priest and a founding figure in the Methodist movement, all insisted that the Ethiopian eunuch *must* be read as a proselyte—a full convert to Judaism—since Acts presents Cornelius as the first gentile to be baptized into

4. Pontius *Life of St. Cyprian* 3.

5. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 4.23.2: *Difficiliorem fuisse gentium, quam Judaeorum conversionem.*

6. Eusebius *Church History* 2.1.13.

7. Ephrem the Syrian *The Pearl* 83.3–5.

8. Jerome *Letters* 108.11.

9. Jerome *Letters* 53.5.

10. Bede *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* 8; Nicephorus Callistus *Church History* 2.6; Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla super totam bibliam* (Frankfurt: Minerva, 1971), vol. 4, Acts 8:27; Martin Luther, “Der Prophet Sacharja ausgelegt (1527),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: Hermann Böhlhaus Nachfolger, 1901), 23:607.

11. John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Corpus Reformatorum, ed. Johann Wilhelm Baum, Eduard Cunitz, and Eduard Reuss (Braunschweig: C. A. Schwetschke and Son, 1889), 67:190–91: *iudaicam religionem . . . turmatim multi ad eam transirent.*

12. Lancelot Andrewes, “A Sermon of the Sending of the Holy Ghost (5/16/1619),” in *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, ed. James Bliss (New York: AMS, 1967), 3:323–24.

the Christian community (Acts 10:1–11:18).¹³ John Lightfoot (1602–1675), a scholar at Cambridge, however, continued to entertain the possibility that the Ethiopian eunuch could have been a Jew, although he ultimately concluded that it simply is not necessary to determine whether the eunuch was a Jew or a proselyte.¹⁴

This multiplicity of readings of the Ethiopian eunuch's religious identity can still be found in modern biblical scholarship. Some scholars argue that the Ethiopian eunuch is to be read as either a Jew or a proselyte,¹⁵ while others argue that he is to be read as a gentile.¹⁶ Luke Timothy Johnson, Howard Clark Kee, and Ben Witherington III have proposed that although the eunuch was likely a gentile, the author of Acts *wanted* him to be read as an individual on the periphery of the Jewish people.¹⁷ Most modern biblical scholars, however, have argued that the Ethiopian eunuch is to be read as occupying an intermediate position between Jew and gentile. Some of these scholars have suggested that the eunuch could be either a proselyte or a God-fearer (a gentile sympathizer

13. Hugo Grotius, "Ad Acta Apostolorum," in *Opera Omnia Theologica* (Basil: E. & J. R. Thurnisios, 1732), vol. 2, Acts 8:27; Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1925), 6:104; John Wesley, *Wesley's Notes on the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury, 1987), 479.

14. John Lightfoot, "The Harmony, Chronicle, and Order of the New Testament," in *The Whole Works of the Late Rev. John Lightfoot, D.D.*, ed. John Rogers Pitman (London: J. F. Dove, 1822), 3:195.

15. See, for example, Joseph A. Alexander, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1859), 1:341–42; Henry J. Cadbury, *The Book of Acts in History* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1955), 16; Charles Marie de Veil, *A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. F. A. Cox (London: J. Haddon, 1851), 206; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 410; Lucius R. Paige, *A Commentary on the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1847), 3:131–32; Keith H. Reeves, "The Ethiopian Eunuch: A Key Transition from Hellenist to Gentile Mission: Acts 8:26–40," in *Mission in Acts: Ancient Narratives in Contemporary Context*, ed. Robert L. Gallagher and Paul Hertig, American Society of Missiology Series 34 (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), 115–20; Robert H. Smith, *Concordia Commentary: Acts* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 144; Marion L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Content, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 205; David Thomas, *A Homiletic Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1870), 122–24.

16. See, for example, Clare Amos, "Acts," in *Sowers and Reapers: A Companion to the Four Gospels and Acts*, ed. John Parr (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 412; John H. Elliott, "Temple versus Household in Luke-Acts: A Contrast in Social Institutions," in *The Social World of Luke-Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 222; Warren A. Gage and John R. Beck, "The Gospel, Zion's Barren Women and the Ethiopian Eunuch," *Crux* 30 (1994): 35; Alfred Loisy, *Les Acts des Apôtres* (Paris: Emile Nourry, 1920), 377; Richard B. Rackham, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Exposition*, Westminster Commentaries (London: Methuen, 1901), 123; Paul N. Tarazi, *The New Testament: An Introduction*, 2 vols. (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 2:218.

who did not fully convert to Judaism).¹⁸ Others have argued that the eunuch must be identified as a proselyte since Cornelius was the first God-fearer to convert,¹⁹ while still others have held that he must be identified as a God-fearer, since Deut. 23:1²⁰ would have prohibited a castrated male from becoming a proselyte.²¹

17. Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 159; Howard Clark Kee, *To Every Nation under Heaven: The Acts of the Apostles*, New Testament in Context (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1997), 110; Ben Witherington III, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 292–93.

18. See, for example, Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 283; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Expositor's Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 361–62; Jack T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 151–53.

19. See, for example, Craig C. Hill, *Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 39; Christopher R. Matthews, *Philip, Apostle and Evangelist: Configurations of a Tradition*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 105 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 87–89; Johannes Munck, *The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), 78–79; Stephen G. Wilson, *The Gentiles and the Gentile Mission in Luke-Acts*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 23 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 171–72.

20. Deuteronomy 23:1: “One whose testicles are bruised or crushed or whose penis is cut off shall not enter into the assembly of the LORD.”

21. See, for example, C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Part 1*, International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 421–22; James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Narrative Commentaries (Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1996), 113–14; F. D. Gealy, “Ethiopian Eunuch,” in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Buttrick, 4 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 2:178; Justo L. González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001), 115–17; Martin Hengel, *Acts and the Earliest History of Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1979), 79; Melancthon W. Jacobus, *Notes, Critical and Explanatory, on the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1859), 181–82; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 338–39; Heinrich A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Paton J. Gloag and William P. Dickson (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1883), 236–37; John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 224; F. Scott Spencer, *The Portrait of Philip in Acts: A Study of Roles and Relations*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 67 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992), 160–72; John T. Squires, “The Function of Acts 8.4–12.25,” *New Testament Studies* 44 (1998): 611–12; Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Reading the New Testament Series (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 89; Axel von Dobbeler, *Der Evangelist Philippus in der Geschichte des Urchristentums: Eine Prosopographische Skizze*, Texte und Arbeiten zum Neutestamentlichen Zeitalter (Tübingen: Francke, 2000), 113–15; David J. Williams, *Acts*, New International Biblical Commentary: New Testament Series (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995), 161.

Modern biblical scholarship has also produced one particularly interesting new interpretation of the ambiguity in the Ethiopian eunuch's religious identity. In the nineteenth century, Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), leader of the Tübingen school of tendency criticism, argued that Acts represented an attempt to reconcile opposing parties within the early Christian community.²² In the twentieth century, Ernst Haenchen built on Baur's thesis and suggested that there were two competing traditions among early Christians regarding the first conversion of a gentile: the story of the Ethiopian eunuch told by the Hellenists (that is, Greek-speaking Jews) and the story of Cornelius told by the Hebrews (that is, Aramaic-speaking Jews). Haenchen concluded that the author of Acts made the eunuch's religious identity ambiguous intentionally, so that he could preserve both traditions.²³ Similarly, Hans Conzelmann has argued that the author of Acts could not present the Ethiopian eunuch as a proselyte because of his sources, nor could he present him as a gentile because of the story of Cornelius, and therefore he purposely made the eunuch's religious identity ambiguous.²⁴

CLASS

Readings of the Ethiopian eunuch's class identity have been fairly consistent throughout the history of interpretation. Basil (c. 330–379), bishop of Caesarea, contrasted the “rich” (πλούσιος), “high and mighty” (σοβαρὸς καὶ ὑπέρογκος) eunuch with the “poor” (πένητα), “unskilled and easily despised” (ἰδιώτην καὶ εὐκαταφρόντων) evangelist Philip.²⁵ Subsequent interpreters have continued to read the Ethiopian eunuch as a person of great power, authority, and wealth.²⁶ Some have even described the eunuch as traveling in a manner worthy of his

22. See Ferdinand Christian Baur, *Paulus, der Apostel Jesu*, ed. Eduard Zeller (Leipzig: Fues, 1866).

23. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary*, trans. Bernard Noble, Gerald Shinn, Hugh Anderson, and R. McL. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), 314–15.

24. Hans Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles: A Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. James Limburg, A. Thomas Kraabel, and Donald H. Juel, *Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 68. Cf. Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1986), 166.

25. Basil of Caesarea *Homily on Holy Baptism* 6. Cf. John Chrysostom *Homilies* 19.154–55.

26. See, for example, Sebastian Bullough, *The Church in the New Testament*, Scripture Text-Books for Catholic Schools (London: Burns, Oates, Macmillan, 1961), 92–93; Calvin, *Acts of the Apostles*, 188–92; Fernando, *Acts*, 284; Jacobus, *Notes, Critical and Explanatory*, 182; Martin Luther, “Von weltlicher Obrigkeit, wie weit man ihr Gehorsam schuldig sei (1523),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 11:256–57; Rackham, *Acts of the Apostles*, 122; D. J. Williams, *Acts*, 161.

high status, although nothing is said about this in the story. Calvin, for example, asserted that the Ethiopian eunuch could not have come to Jerusalem secretly, for a “great retinue” (*magnum comitatum*) would have accompanied such a “great ruler” (*tantus dynastes*).²⁷ And Joseph A. Alexander claimed that the eunuch would have been riding in “equipage suited to his rank,” with an entourage that included one or more attendants.²⁸ Some interpreters have even attributed to the Ethiopian eunuch a variety of titles for powerful officials drawn from their own cultures, such as “magistrate and prefect,”²⁹ “chief governor,”³⁰ “great lord treasurer,”³¹ “lord chamberlain,”³² and “finance minister.”³³

Some modern biblical scholars have argued that there is a certain type of ambiguity in this aspect of the Ethiopian eunuch’s identity: although his class status among his own people would have been high, he would have been marginalized within Jewish communities because of his physical condition as a castrated male.³⁴ Recently, a few scholars have broadened this argument and suggested that the Ethiopian eunuch would have been marginalized because of his physical condition not only within Jewish culture but also within many of the other cultures of the Greco–Roman world. Ronald J. Allen, for example, has noted that although ancient rulers trusted eunuchs, most ancient people

27. Calvin, *Acts of the Apostles*, 191.

28. J. A. Alexander, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:343.

29. Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: Acts, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians*, Studies in the History of Christian Thought 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 294.

30. Gerald T. Sheppard, ed., *The Geneva Bible: The Annotated New Testament, 1602 Edition*, Pilgrim Classic Commentaries (New York: Pilgrim, 1989), marginal note on Acts 8:27.

31. Lancelot Andrewes, “A Sermon of the Nativity (12/25/1620),” in *The Works of Lancelot Andrewes*, ed. James Bliss (New York: AMS, 1967), 1:244.

32. Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, 6:104.

33. Fernando, *Acts*, 283; Hengel, *Acts and the Earliest History*, 79; George M. Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary from the Aramaic and the Ancient Eastern Customs* (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman, 1945), 62–63; Andreas Lindemann, “Der ‘Äthiopische Eunuch’ und die Anfänge der Mission unter den Völkern nach Apg 8–11,” in *Die Apostelgeschichte und die hellenistische Geschichtsschreibung: Festschrift für Eckhard Plümacher zu seinem 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Cilliers Breytenbach and Jens Schröter, Arbeiten zur Geschichte des Antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums 57 (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 123–24; Longenecker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 363; Polhill, *Acts*, 223–24.

34. See, for example, Amos, “Acts,” 412; Dunn, *Acts of the Apostles*, 113; Jacobus, *Notes, Critical and Explanatory*, 181–82; L. T. Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 158; Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Symbolic Universe of Luke–Acts,” in *The Social World of Luke–Acts: Models for Interpretation*, ed. Jerome H. Neyrey (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1991), 288; Richard I. Pervo, *Profit with Delight: The Literary Genre of the Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 70; Reeves, “Ethiopian Eunuch,” 117; Spencer, *Acts*, 92–93; Robert W. Wall, “The Acts of the Apostles: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 10:142–45; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 295–96.

considered them “damaged goods.”³⁵ Spencer and Axel von Dobbeler have even argued that eunuchs in antiquity “belonged to the most despised and derided group of men.”³⁶

There is a fundamental question about the Ethiopian eunuch’s class identity, however, that most scholars have failed to address: Was the Ethiopian eunuch a free person, a slave, or a freedman? George M. Lamsa has noted that eunuchs in antiquity were usually slaves who had been castrated, and this is an important point that I will examine in greater detail in chapter 4.³⁷ Spencer has similarly observed that eunuchs were often slaves who had been brutalized as a form of punishment or subjugation, and he has argued that even those who rose to positions of power could not entirely escape the stigma of enslavement and castration.³⁸ I think that Spencer’s latter argument suggests an ambiguity in the Ethiopian eunuch’s class status that interpreters of this text have not adequately addressed. While the eunuch’s “high social standing and wealth” are confirmed by several details in the text, such as his possession of both the means to travel and a scroll,³⁹ his status as a castrated male suggests that he was a slave or a freedman. How is one to interpret the class identity of a character who was wealthy, powerful, *and* a slave or a freedman?

RACE

Some contemporary scholars have argued that it is not appropriate to use race as a category for analyzing ancient identities, while others have argued that *race*, *racialist thinking*, and *racism* are useful concepts in the study of antiquity.⁴⁰ I will address this debate in chapter 4.⁴¹ For now, I focus on how readers have

35. Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Luke-Acts*, Preaching Classic Texts (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 53.

36. F. Scott Spencer, “The Ethiopian Eunuch and His Bible: A Social-Science Analysis,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 22, no. 4 (1992): 156; von Dobbeler, *Der Evangelist Philippus*, 114. Both cite G. Petzke, “Eunouchos,” in *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1983), 2:202–4.

37. Lamsa, *New Testament Commentary*, 61. See pp. 98–99 and 113–15 below.

38. Spencer, *Portrait of Philip*, 167–68. Cf. Carson, “Do You Understand What You Are Reading?” 96–105; Theodore W. Jennings Jr., *The Man Jesus Loved: Homoerotic Narratives from the New Testament* (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2003), 155.

39. Spencer, *Portrait of Philip*, 159. Cf. Matthews, *Philip, Apostle and Evangelist*, 79.

40. On the status of the question and for arguments in favor of the usefulness of these concepts, see Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 1–51. See also Rachana Kamtekar, “Distinction without a Difference? Race and *Genos* in Plato,” in *Philosophers on Race: Critical Essays*, ed. Julie K. Ward and Tommy L. Lott (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 1–13; and, in the same volume, Julie K. Ward, “*Ethnos* in the *Politics*: Aristotle and Race,” 14–37.

41. See pp. 115–518 below.

interpreted the Ethiopian eunuch's skin color. Early interpreters of Acts 8:26–40 seem to have shared a consensus regarding the color of the Ethiopian eunuch's skin, a consensus that is particularly apparent in interpretations that make use of contrasts that would be considered racist today. For example, Ephrem the Syrian asserted that, “out of black men [Jesus] made white men.”⁴² Gregory of Nazianzus addressed the following words to the eunuch himself: “though you be Ethiopian in body, be made white in soul.”⁴³ Jerome claimed that “though against nature, the Ethiopian does change his skin and the leopard his spots [Jer 13:23].”⁴⁴ Following Jerome, Bede asserted that “the Ethiopian changed his skin,” which he interpreted to mean that the stain of the Ethiopian eunuch's sins was washed away by baptism, and that he ascended from the water “whitewashed.”⁴⁵ Similarly, Luther connected the Ethiopian eunuch with “the blackness of sins confessed.”⁴⁶ While avoiding these metaphorical uses of “black” and “white,” many modern biblical interpreters have continued to refer to the color of the Ethiopian eunuch's skin, calling him “black,”⁴⁷ “black-skinned,”⁴⁸ “black African,”⁴⁹ “black Cushite,”⁵⁰ “dark-skinned,”⁵¹ or “dark-complexioned.”⁵²

42. Ephrem the Syrian *The Pearl* 3.2.

43. Gregory of Nazianzus *On Holy Baptism* 40: κᾶν ἤς Αἰθίοψ τὸ σῶμα, τὴν ψυχὴν λευκάνθητι (*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, ed. J.-P. Migne [Paris: Migne, 1858], vol. 36).

44. Jerome *Letters* 69.6; cf. 108.11: Mutat contra naturam “Aethiops pellem suam et pardus varietates suas.”

45. Bede *Acts* 8: Ibi enim quod Jeremias admirando proloquitur, mutavit Aethiops pellem suam, id est, sorde de peccatorum abluta, de lavacro Jesu dealbatus ascendit.

46. Martin Luther, “Psalmenvorlesungen (1513–15),” in *D. Martin Luthers Werke* (Weimar: H. Böhlau Nachfolger, 1885), 3:409: Figuratur autem et nominator Ecclesia gentium Aethiopia, ut satis patet propter nigredinem peccati ac quia sese nigram confitetur.

47. See, for example, Carson, ““Do You Understand What You Are Reading?”” 146; Gage and Beck, “The Gospel, Zion's Barren Women,” 36; Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 337; Polhill, *Acts*, 223; Spencer, *Acts*, 92; Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: A Literary Interpretation*, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 2:108; Nancy L. Wilson, *Our Tribe: Queer Folks, God, Jesus and the Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 131; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 295.

48. See, for example, S. Bullough, *Church in the New Testament*, 92–93; Krodel, *Acts*, 168.

49. See, for example, Victoria S. Kolakowski, “The Concubine and the Eunuch: Queering Up the Breeder's Bible,” in *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*, ed. Robert E. Goss and Amy Adams Squire Strongheart (New York: Harrington Park, 1997), 45; Clarice J. Martin, “A Chamberlain's Journey and the Challenge of Interpretation for Liberation,” *Semeia* 47 (1989): 110.

50. See, for example, M. Baumgarten, *The Acts of the Apostles: Or, the History of the Church in the Apostolic Age*, trans. A. J. W. Morrison, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1854), 204.

51. See, for example, Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon, 2003), 141; Lindemann, “Der Ἄθιοπισche Eunuch,” 120.

The question of the Ethiopian eunuch's skin color has been intertwined with broader cultural issues of race and racism in modern biblical interpretation. Writing in the nineteenth century in a context in which some scholars have recently located "the German invention of race," Hermann Olshausen argued that Ethiopia was the eunuch's place of residence, not his place of origin.⁵³ In the context of American race relations in the late nineteenth century, Henry C. Vedder asserted, "One need not infer that [the eunuch] was a negro."⁵⁴ Some biblical scholars have concluded that the Ethiopian eunuch's skin color is ambiguous. F. D. Gealy, for example, has argued that although the eunuch was clearly an "outlander," his origin was "strictly undetermined."⁵⁵ Others have avoided the issue of the color of the Ethiopian eunuch's skin altogether, focusing instead on the ancient identification of Ethiopia as an "end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).⁵⁶ Several African-American scholars, on the other hand, have emphasized the eunuch's identity as a black Ethiopian,⁵⁷ and Abraham Smith has argued that this racial identity would have enhanced the eunuch's class status, because in Greco-Roman culture black Ethiopians were seen as "wealthy, wise, and militarily mighty."⁵⁸

52. See, for example, Talbert, *Reading Acts*, 88.

53. Hermann Olshausen, *Biblical Commentary on the Gospels and on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. John Gill, Richard Garvey, and William Lindsay, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1850), 4:461–62. On the cultural context, see Sara Eigen and Mark J. Larrimore, eds., *The German Invention of Race*, SUNY Series on Philosophy and Race (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006).

54. Henry C. Vedder, *The Dawn of Christianity: Or, Studies of the Apostolic Church* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1894), 61.

55. Gealy, "Ethiopian Eunuch," 178.

56. See, for example, Amos, "Acts," 412; Thomas L. Brodie, "Towards Unraveling the Rhetorical Imitation of Sources in Acts: 2 Kgs 5 as One Component of Acts 8,9–40," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 51; F. F. Bruce, "Philip and the Ethiopian," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 24, no. 2 (1989): 379–80; Cadbury, *Book of Acts in History*, 15; Fernando, *Acts*, 283; González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit*, 115; Hengel, *Acts and the Earliest History of Christianity*, 80; Matthews, *Philip, Apostle and Evangelist*, 72–73; Pervo, *Profit with Delight*, 70.

57. See, for example, Gay L. Byron, *Symbolic Blackness and Ethnic Difference in Early Christian Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 109–15; Carson, " 'Do You Understand What You Are Reading?'" 146; Cain Hope Felder, "Race, Racism, and the Biblical Narratives," in *Stony the Road We Trod: African American Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Cain Hope Felder (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 141–43; Clarice J. Martin, "The Function of Acts 8:26–40 within the Narrative Structure of the Book of Acts: The Significance of the Eunuch's Provenance for Acts 1:8c" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1985), 84–122; Frank M. Snowden Jr., *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 105.

58. Abraham Smith, "A Second Step in African Biblical Interpretation: A Generic Reading Analysis of Acts 8:26–40," in *Reading from This Place*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 1:225.

GENDER

The primary question interpreters have asked regarding the Ethiopian eunuch's gender identity is whether he is to be read as a castrated male, although few have explicitly addressed this *as* an issue of gender. In the early centuries of Christian interpretation, when eunuchs were still a social reality,⁵⁹ there appears to have been a consensus among interpreters that the Ethiopian eunuch was a castrated male. Jerome emphasized the eunuch's "sterility" (*sterilitatem*),⁶⁰ and Arator, a sixth-century poet, referred to the Ethiopian eunuch's "sterile body" (*sterilique in corpore*).⁶¹ Similarly, in a passage in which he also referred specifically to the Ethiopian eunuch, Athanasius (c. 298–373), bishop of Alexandria, described eunuchs in general as being "fruitless in nature" (τῆ φύσει . . . ἄγονοι).⁶² In *On Baptism* by Tertullian (c. 155–230), a theologian in Carthage, and in the Latin translation of Irenaeus's *Against Heresies*, two different Latin words are applied to the Ethiopian eunuch: *eunuchus* and *spado*. The use of both terms, combined with the derivation of *spado* from a Greek verb meaning "to tear or to rend," suggests that these interpreters also viewed the eunuch as a castrated male.⁶³ Some subsequent interpreters shared this reading. Erasmus, for example, used yet another Latin term that emphasized the Ethiopian eunuch's status as a castrated male: *eviratus* ("unmanned one").⁶⁴ Based on the role of eunuchs in antiquity as guardians of harems, Cornelius à Lapide (1567–1637), a Flemish Jesuit scholar, argued that the Ethiopian eunuch must have been a castrated male because he served a queen whose "inviolability" (*puclitia*) he was charged with guarding.⁶⁵

As far as I can tell, the first Christian interpreters to suggest that "eunuch" could function as a title of rank applied to persons who were not castrated were Theodore (c. 602–690), archbishop of Canterbury, and Hadrian (died 710), abbot of a monastery in Canterbury, although they noted that among the Persians and the Romans, *all* eunuchs were castrated.⁶⁶ Later, based on his understanding of the three categories of eunuchs in Matt. 19:12,⁶⁷ Nicholas

59. See Carson, "Do You Understand What You Are Reading?" 11–12.

60. Jerome *Against Jovinianus* 1.12.

61. Arator *On the Acts of the Apostles* 1.679.

62. Athanasius *History of the Arians* 5.38.

63. Irenaeus *Against Heresies* 3.12.8; Tertullian *On Baptism* 18. I will discuss the different methods of castration and the different terms for eunuchs in antiquity in chapter 4; see pp. 97 below.

64. Desiderius Erasmus, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament*, 294.

65. Cornelius à Lapide, *In Acta Apostolorum*, ed. Augustin Crampon, *Commentaria in Scripturam Sacram* 17 (Paris: Ludovicus Vivés, 1866), 204. I will discuss the various roles of eunuchs in antiquity in chapter 4; see pp. 96–106 below.

of Lyra argued that *eunuchus* in Acts 8:27 should not be understood with regard to the genitals (*membrorum genitalium*) but rather with regard to chastity (*castitate*).⁶⁸ In a reading that has profoundly influenced the rest of the history of interpretation, especially among Protestants, Calvin claimed that, because the terms *man* and *eunuch* are both used of this character, the latter must be a title, and he argued that the practice among ancient Near Eastern rulers of setting castrated males over important affairs resulted in the indiscriminate use of the title *eunuch* even for those who were actually men (that is, not castrated).⁶⁹ In light of Nicholas of Lyra's understanding of the eunuch as a model of chastity, it may be significant that Calvin's interpretation, which reduced the term *eunuch* to a title, was produced in a context in which he and other reformers were challenging the enforced celibacy of clergy and the glorification of the voluntary celibacy of those in religious orders.

The claim that the term *eunuch* had two different meanings—"castrated male" and "high official"—has been repeated over and over again in modern biblical scholarship. Some have argued that in Acts 8:26–40 the meaning is "high official."⁷⁰ Others have argued that the meaning is "castrated male," and they have cited different factors to support this reading: the use of a second term in Acts 8:27, *δυνάστης*, which clearly refers to the eunuch's office;⁷¹ the association of the Ethiopian eunuch with a female sovereign;⁷² and the repetition throughout Acts 8:26–40 of only the term *eunuch* out of all the terms used for this character in Acts 8:27.⁷³ Still others have concluded that the meaning of the term in Acts 8:26–40 is ambiguous.⁷⁴ Recently, however, a few scholars have challenged the claim that the word *eunuch* had two different meanings in antiquity, and they have suggested that all the eunuchs of the Bible

66. Theodore and Hadrian, *First Commentary on the Pentateuch*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 10 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 206.

67. Matthew 19:12: "For there are eunuchs who were born from the mother's womb this way, and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by people, and there are eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who can accept this accept it."

68. Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla super totam bibliam*, Acts 8:27. Nicholas read the Ethiopian eunuch as one who had made himself a eunuch for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, which had been interpreted as signifying voluntary celibacy from very early in the history of interpretation.

69. Calvin, *Acts of the Apostles*, 189–91: *Virum appellat, quem paulo post eunuchum fuisse dicit: sed quia in Oriente solebant reges et reginae eunuchos praeficere summis negotiis: inde factum est, ut dynastae promiscue vocarentur eunuchi, quem tamen viri essent.*

70. See, for example, Longenecker, *Acts of the Apostles*, 363; William H. Willimon, *Acts*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 71–72; S. G. Wilson, *Gentiles and the Gentile Mission*, 171.

should be understood as castrated males.⁷⁵ I will address this issue further in chapter 1.

I have discovered one strand in the history of interpretation that has explicitly addressed the issue of the eunuch's gender identity. In antiquity, Jerome was struck by the use of the terms *man* and *eunuch* for the same individual, and he addressed this issue in several writings. In *Against Jovinianus*, he wrote concerning the "eunuch" (*spado*) that, "on account of the strength of his faith, he obtained the name of man."⁷⁶ In *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, he wrote that after his baptism, the Ethiopian eunuch "deserved to be called a man."⁷⁷ In *Commentary on Zephaniah*, he concluded, "He was not only a eunuch, but with the added title of man, *eunuchus vir Aethiops*."⁷⁸ Finally, in one of his letters, he introduced this character as "the holy eunuch, or rather man—for thus the Scripture calls him."⁷⁹ Perhaps because of his own social location in a context in which eunuchs were a social reality, Jerome was aware that *man* was not a term that would normally be applied to one called *eunuch*, and thus he saw this

71. See, for example, Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles, Part 1*, 424–25; Baumgarten, *Acts of the Apostles*, 202–3; Conzelmann, *Acts of the Apostles*, 68; Dunn, *Acts of the Apostles*, 113; Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 104; González, *Acts: The Gospel of the Spirit*, 114; L. T. Johnson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 154–55; Kolakowski, "Concubine and the Eunuch," 45; Krodel, *Acts*, 168; Lenski, *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles*, 337; I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 162; Matthews, *Philip, Apostle and Evangelist*, 79; Meyer, *Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*, 236–37; Polhill, *Acts*, 223–24; Spencer, *Portrait of Philip*, 166–67; von Dobbeler, *Der Evangelist Philippus*, 113; D. J. Williams, *Acts*, 161.

72. See, e.g., Baumgarten, *Acts of the Apostles*, 202–3; Dunn, *Acts of the Apostles*, 114; Jacobus, *Notes, Critical and Explanatory*, 181–82; Krodel, *Acts*, 168; Meyer, *Handbook to the Acts of the Apostles*, 236–37; Spencer, *Portrait of Philip*, 167; Witherington, *Acts of the Apostles*, 296.

73. See, for example, Gealy, "Ethiopian Eunuch," 178; Matthews, *Philip, Apostle and Evangelist*, 77; Spencer, *Portrait of Philip*, 167; von Dobbeler, *Der Evangelist Philippus*, 115.

74. See, for example, S. Bullough, *Church in the New Testament*, 93; Cadbury, *Book of Acts in History*, 17; Fernando, *Acts*, 283; Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 412; Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 310; A. Smith, "Second Step in African Biblical Interpretation," 227.

75. See, for example, Janet Everhart, "Hidden Eunuchs of the Hebrew Bible," in *Society of Biblical Literature 2002 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 149–51; Lindemann, "Der 'Äthiopische Eunuch,'" 120; Reeves, "Ethiopian Eunuch," 117.

76. Jerome *Against Jovinianus* 1.12: qui ob robur fidei, viri nomen obtinuit.

77. Jerome *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah* 14.53: vir meruit appellari.

78. Jerome *Commentary on Zephaniah* 1.1: Et non solum eunuchus; sed cum additamento viri ponitur, eunuchus vir Aethiops.

79. Jerome *Letters* 53.5: sanctus eunuchus, immo vir—sic enim eum scriptura congnominat.

as an issue that needed to be addressed in the interpretation of this text. Bede took up this strand of interpretation from Jerome, claiming that the eunuch “was called a man for his virtue and integrity of mind.”⁸⁰ Bede was here playing on the etymological relationship between the words *virtue* and *man* in Latin, as well as the sense of *integrity* as *wholeness*: he was claiming that the *eunuch*, whose body was not *whole*, was called a *man* because of his *virtue/manliness* and the *wholeness* of his mind. Erasmus also took up this strand of interpretation from Jerome. Having noted the conflict involved in calling the same individual both *man* and *eunuch*, and having reminded his readers that in Latin eunuchs were also called *evirati* (“unmanned ones”), he concluded, “Truly in Christ there is neither sex nor condition, but a new creature.”⁸¹

After Erasmus, this strand seems to have disappeared from the history of interpretation, and it is only recently that scholars have again begun to address the eunuch’s gender identity. In a commentary published in 1986, Gerhard Krodel gestured in the direction of gender identity when he wrote that the eunuch was “only half a man.”⁸² More recently, Spencer has emphasized the Ethiopian eunuch’s “peculiar gender-status as a *eunuch*” and has concluded that, “bearing in his ‘feminized’ body the marks of a violated male . . . the eunuch became the epitome of male shame.”⁸³ Similarly, Carson has referred to the Ethiopian eunuch as “a man with female attributes,”⁸⁴ and, echoing Jerome, he has called the use of the word *man* for one without testicles “shocking.”⁸⁵ Finally, Victoria S. Kolakowski has argued that eunuchs “were viewed as being of ambiguous gender in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds,” and she has suggested that eunuchs fell into a category “that we today would broadly call *transgendered*.”⁸⁶

SEXUALITY

Sexuality is the aspect of the Ethiopian eunuch’s identity to which biblical interpreters have paid the least attention over the centuries. Early in the history of interpretation, Jerome, a proponent of virginity, described the Ethiopian

80. Bede *Acts* 8: Pro virtute et integritate mentis vir appellatur.

81. Erasmus, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament*, 294: Verum in Christo neque sexus est, neque conditio, sed nova creatura.

82. Krodel, *Acts*, 168.

83. Spencer, *Acts*, 93.

84. Carson, “‘Do You Understand What You Are Reading?’” 145.

85. Carson, “‘Do You Understand What You Are Reading?’” 91.

86. Kolakowski, “Concubine and the Eunuch,” 42; cf. Jennings, *Man Jesus Loved*, 155–56.

eunuch as a “type” (*typus*) of those who have “made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:12), which he interpreted as signifying their “virginity” (*virginitatis*) and “purity” (*puritate*).⁸⁷ Arator, in an allegorical reading of Acts, declared the eunuch to be the right herald for the church, because, “As [faith] proceeds, lust is driven off, and the chaste capture the heavenly kingdoms.”⁸⁸ As I will demonstrate in chapter 4, other ancient writers speculated quite a bit about the sexuality of eunuchs, and, unlike these Christian interpreters, they most emphatically did not associate eunuchs with chastity.⁸⁹ In light of this Christian association, however, it is perhaps not surprising that in the context of the Reformation, when reformers were challenging the privileging of celibacy, discussion of the eunuch’s virginity disappeared from the history of interpretation. In fact, discussion of the Ethiopian eunuch’s sexuality disappeared altogether.

The issue of the eunuch’s sexual identity has begun to be addressed again only very recently. Some contemporary biblical interpreters, for example, Warren A. Gage and John R. Beck, have defined the Ethiopian eunuch’s sexuality in terms of “sterility” and the “inability to father children,”⁹⁰ and Spencer has referred to the eunuch as “one impotent and therefore ‘barren.’”⁹¹ Other contemporary interpreters have challenged the assumption that eunuchs were chaste. Kolakowski, for example, has argued that eunuchs who lacked “secondary sexual characteristics, such as a beard, were often used for pederastic [sexual activity].”⁹² Similarly, Theodore W. Jennings Jr. has noted that, in antiquity, some masters castrated their prepubescent male slaves for sexual purposes.⁹³ Finally, Carson has observed that some eunuchs in antiquity were accused of sexual promiscuity.⁹⁴ Although he describes this as a “type of ironic slander” directed against those castrated before puberty, whose genitalia remained “immature,” I will argue in chapter 4 that such accusations reflect an ancient awareness that those castrated after puberty could still achieve erection and thus could still function as sexual penetrators.⁹⁵

87. Jerome *Against Jovinianus* 1.12.

88. Arator *On the Acts of the Apostles* 1.705b–707: quam denique recte / Prævius huic spado est? quo procedente libido / Pellitur, et capiunt cœlestia regna pudici.

89. See pp. 111–13 below.

90. Gage and Beck, “Gospel, Zion’s Barren Women,” 35.

91. Spencer, *Portrait of Philip*, 182.

92. Kolakowski, “Concubine and the Eunuch,” 42.

93. Jennings, *Man Jesus Loved*, 155–56.

94. Carson, “‘Do You Understand What You Are Reading?’” 103.

95. See pp. 112–13 below.

CONCLUSION

How, then, is an interpreter to view the various aspects of the Ethiopian eunuch's identity? Was he a Jew, a gentile, a proselyte, or a God-fearer? Was he a freeborn person of high status, a slave, a freedman, or some combination of the above? Was he a black-skinned Ethiopian? Did he have intact genitals, or was he castrated? What was the gender of a castrated male? Was he a celibate virgin, a receptive partner in sexual activity with men, or an insertive partner in sexual activity with women and/or men? The text itself permits all these readings with all their attendant ambiguities.

Over the centuries, interpreters have addressed these ambiguities in at least four ways. Some have ignored these ambiguities altogether and have read the text as if the answers to all these questions of identity were clear. Others have noted the ambiguities and concluded that it is impossible to resolve them. Still others have tried to resolve the ambiguities and to reach definitive conclusions about the various aspects of the Ethiopian eunuch's identity. Finally, a few interpreters have argued that, although there were clear and certain answers to these questions in the world behind the text, the author himself introduced ambiguities into the text in order to serve some particular rhetorical purpose.

I am particularly interested in this fourth approach, which I would describe as *social-rhetorical*. In addressing the ambiguity in the Ethiopian eunuch's religious identity, for example, scholars employing this approach have begun by analyzing the social context of Acts in terms of a conflict between Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking groups within the early Christian communities. They have then attempted to analyze how the ambiguity concerning the eunuch's religious identity in this text functioned rhetorically within that social context to diminish the conflict between these two groups' competing stories of the beginning of the communities' mission to the gentiles. Is it possible to read the other ambiguities in the Ethiopian eunuch's identity as rhetorically productive in a particular social context? I will argue not only that it is possible but that these ambiguities are themselves central to the rhetoric of this story and of the book of Acts as a whole.

In order to make this argument, I will employ queer theory, which I here define in a preliminary way as a constellation of approaches to issues of identity, difference, and ambiguity that have emerged in the cultural and intellectual context of postmodernism. There is no single definition of *postmodernism* or *postmodern theory* with which all postmodern theorists would agree, but there are certain characteristics that are widely shared by many postmodern theories: a refusal to posit any premise as the privileged foundation for truth claims; a suspicion that the totalizing and universalizing claims of modernist thought

suppress differences and counterexamples; a suspicion that assumptions deemed *natural* are actually ideological assertions; and a focus on the local and particular, the provisional and contingent, rather than on the general and the universal, which has been characteristic of modernist thought.⁹⁶ I find particularly helpful the notion that “[p]ostmodernity’s assertion of the value of inclusive ‘both/and’ thinking deliberately contests the exclusive ‘either/or’ binary oppositions of modernity. Postmodern paradox, ambiguity, irony, indeterminacy, and contingency are seen to replace modern closure, unity, order, the absolute, and the rational.”⁹⁷

Postmodern theories of identity have focused on the de-centering of the coherent, unified, self-determining subject posited most famously by René Descartes.⁹⁸ Some postmodern theorists have employed deconstructive approaches to analyze the ways in which modernist identity categories are falsely unifying, universalizing, exclusionary, and normative, and to produce new analyses of identities as fluid, contingent, and socially constructed.⁹⁹ Building on this work, queer theorists initially focused on issues of identity, difference, and ambiguity in the social construction of gender and sexuality. Recently, however, some queer theorists have begun to apply the deconstructive strategies they have developed in their studies of gender and sexuality to other aspects of identity, such as race and class.

I contend that strategies developed by queer theorists offer new ways of reading the ambiguities in the identity of the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8:26–40

96. See, for example, A. K. M. Adam, *What Is Postmodern Biblical Criticism?*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship: New Testament Series, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 1–23; Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Interrogations*, Critical Perspectives (New York: Guilford, 1991), 16–28; Lawrence Cahoon, “Introduction,” in *From Modernism to Postmodernism: An Anthology*, ed. Lawrence Cahoon (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 1–21; Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon, “Introduction,” in *A Postmodern Reader*, ed. Joseph Natoli and Linda Hutcheon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), vii–xiii.

97. Natoli and Hutcheon, “Introduction,” ix.

98. See, for example, Mark K. George, “Foucault,” in *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*, ed. A. K. M. Adam (St. Louis: Chalice, 2000), 96; Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 77–78; Ki Namaste, “The Politics of Inside/Out: Queer Theory, Poststructuralism, and a Sociological Approach to Sexuality,” in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. Steven Seidman (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 194–95; Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 40–42.

99. See, for example, Steven Angelides, *A History of Bisexuality*, Chicago Series on Sexuality, History, and Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 14; Steven Epstein, “A Queer Encounter: Sociology and the Study of Sexuality,” in *Queer Theory/Sociology*, ed. Steven Seidman (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 155–56.

as rhetorically productive. I will follow the example of queer theorists and focus first on gender and sexuality. Therefore, in chapter 1 I will begin by addressing the question of whether it is legitimate to read the Ethiopian eunuch as a castrated male. In chapter 2, I will introduce queer theory and will examine several strategies that queer theorists have developed for engaging issues of identity, difference, and ambiguity. In chapter 3, I will analyze the dominant Greco-Roman construction of masculinity in antiquity, as well as constructions of masculinity in several ancient Jewish subcultures. In chapter 4, I will examine the identity of eunuchs in relation to the discourses of gender, sexuality, class, and race underlying these ancient constructions of masculinity. Then in chapter 5, I will utilize my conclusions from the previous chapters in a social-rhetorical analysis of the story of the Ethiopian eunuch and its role in the book of Acts as a whole.