

TEACHING THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD  
BIBLICAL ALLUSIONS

1. "They sat in judgment" (2)

This refers to the Judgment Day when God shall judge the living and the dead. The narrator is criticizing the men who "pass nations through their mouths" because they are assuming a God-like role.

2. "Lemme scrub mah feet." (5)

Janie is washing her feet after she returns to Eatonville. The reference is to a common practice upon returning from a trip, mentioned in Genesis 28:4 (among others): "And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early and go on your ways."

3. "Sam say most of 'em goes to church so they'll be sure to rise in Judgment." (5)

This is another reference to the Judgment Day (see #1 above).

4. The "pear tree" scene (10-11)

This is an allusion to Genesis 2-4, the story of the Garden of Eden. In some ways Janie is a prelapsarian (before the Fall) figure, full of the innocence that filled man and woman before they disobeyed God and tasted of the Tree of Knowledge.

5. "A highway through de wilderness" (15)

This is a general reference to the wildernesses that permeate the Bible and a specific reference to Matthew 4:1: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil." The wilderness was an evil symbol, a place of temptation and hardship.

6. "Isaac and Rebecca at de well" (40)

The reference is from Genesis 24:13-15. Isaac waits at the well for a sign of the woman he is to marry, and Rebecca comes out and gives him water to drink. Their union is destined by God.

7. "And when Ah touch de match tuh dat lamp-wick let de light penetrate inside of yuh, and let it shine, let it shine, let it shine." (43)

This is a reference to Genesis 1:3, when God says, "Let there be light." Joe Starks continues to equate himself with God.

8. "He felt like rushing forth with the meat knife and chopping off the offending hand." (52)

This is a reference to Matthew 5:30: "And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee," from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Joe is quick to judge and take harsh punishment for the slightest mistake.

9. "The thing that Saul's daughter had done to David." (75)

This is a reference to I Samuel 18-19. Saul promises his daughter Michal to David in exchange for David's defeating the Philistines. In reality, Saul expected David to be killed. David instead slew two hundred Philistines, and Saul gave Michal to him as his wife. Instead of following her father's directions to arrange for David's death, Michal helped David escape. Michal was originally willing to help her father, but after falling in love with David, she betrayed her father to help her husband.

10. "...he'd be talkin' de water lak old Peter befo' he knowed it." (97)

This is a reference to Matthew 14:28-29: "And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus." Tea Cake is teasing Janie about getting a boat.

11. "Ah'm de Apostle Paul tuh de Gentiles." (100)

This is a reference to St. Paul's preaching the Gospel to the gentiles. He was visited on the road to Damascus and directed to preach the word. Tea Cake is teasing Janie about her thoughts regarding his behavior.

12. "You got de keys to de kingdom." (104)

This is a reference to Matthew 16:18-19: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Tea Cake is expressing his faith and commitment to Janie.

13. The Flood in Chapter 18

This is a reference to Genesis 6-9, the story of the Flood of the earth. God is displeased with his creatures and decides to bring on a flood. He spares Noah and a selected few to stay in the Ark until the flood waters recede. A dove carrying an olive branch in its mouth is the sign they must wait for to know that land is near.

14. "The wheel kept turning round and round." (158)

This is a reference to the wheels in the Book of Ezekiel, a prophet who preached destruction unless the people repented.

15. "His pale white horse had galloped over waters, and thundered over land." (160)

This is a reference to the Book of Revelation 6:2: "And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him; and he went forth conquering, and to conquer." The white horse is one of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, one of the signs of the end of the world. The first horseman represents either Christ or the Anti-Christ, depending on the interpretation. It is the only one with a crown. It also has a bow and decides judgments on the wicked of the earth.