

June 13, 2010

## NOAH'S PROPHECY

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What are some of the jobs of a pastor? I think every pastor is going to approach the work a little differently, but I'd like to suggest that part of what we do includes leaving people better than we found them, setting to right the things we can and making the best out the things we can't. Really, that's what this whole investigation of Genesis is about: I want to clarify Scriptures, support your reason and your faith, and refute some of the misunderstandings that skeptics allege about the Bible. The passage we are studying today has a long and storied history of abuse that needs to be addressed.

Today's sermon is going to touch on several important subjects, from racism to drunkenness to fatherhood to world history. Let's turn our attention to Genesis 9, starting in verse 18 today:

*And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham is the father of Canaan.*

*These are the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.*

One thing I learned as a teacher is that "repetition is the key to learning." We've been told elsewhere about Noah's three sons, and we see it again here. It's important to note that the Bible is stating in no uncertain terms that all humans today descended from these three sons and their wives. Everyone from here to Timbuktu descended from Noah through one of these three sons. These three are the progenitors of all of the people groups of the entire world. If this be true, then there is only one race: *the human race*. I believe this is the exact teaching of this passage. Do you recall Acts 17 in which the apostle Paul addresses the Greeks, telling them the truth about God and creation? Let me read a few verses there, starting in verse 24:

*God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;*

*Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;*

***And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;***

*That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:*

*For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring (emphasis added).*

Did you notice that Paul declares that we are all of one blood? This, my friends, is the *only* cure for racism. When we understand that all humans come from the same immediate family, and when we understand that there is no scale of evolutionary development from one "race" to another, then we can be free to see humanity as God sees it. Surely there are cultural differences, linguistic differences, and

physical differences such as skin color and facial features that are unmistakable within different branches of the human family, but we are all of one blood. On the other hand, if we believe evolution to be true, then we throw the door open wide for racism. That's not to say that every person who believes in evolution is a racist, but it is to say that evolution creates the perfect atmosphere for racism. In fact, the book that gave evolutionary thought its supposed scientific basis was Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species*; but the original, full title was *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. The results were disastrous. Darwin's cousin started the eugenics movement, which claimed that humanity would benefit from "selective breeding" to weed out the inferior, the weak, and the immoral segments of society. The movement took root even in America, where thousands of people were sterilized without their knowledge or consent. Yes, it happened here in America! Margaret Sanger, one of the promoters of the eugenics movement, founded Planned Parenthood, which to this day places most of its clinics among low-income minorities. We need hardly mention Hitler's usage of Darwin's ideas; but Hitler was not alone in using Darwin's ideas to justify monstrous deeds. In fact, that eugenics movement is not dead! It's very much alive among the so-called intellectual elite.<sup>1</sup>

Remember, people can be evolutionists without being racists; but the problem is that evolution is really racially biased at its very core. The *only* true answer to racism is found in the Bible: we are "made of one blood."

There is one more item of interest here before we move on: "Ham is the father of Canaan." This is a theme that will be repeated. Tuck that away in your mind for now; we'll get back to it.

We come to the next portion of the narrative in verse 20:

*And Noah began to be an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:*

*And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.*

One of the unique things about the Bible, something that gives it the stamp of authenticity, is that it does not gloss over the failures of its heroes. They are presented to us "warts and all." This means it is very, very important to remember a basic rule of biblical interpretation: "the narrative is not the norm." In other words, when we read about someone doing something in the Bible, we cannot assume that God has put His stamp of approval on it. Much of what the skeptics say to discredit the Bible comes from a violation of this rule, because they wish to show that the Bible actually promotes bad behavior and immorality. That's not the case at all. Instead, God allows us to see that bad behavior has bad consequences (and conversely that good behavior has good consequences). The overall principle is that we reap what we sow! Noah here stumbles and falls into drunkenness. Does that mean we also are to become drunkards? Absolutely not!

I should mention that some commentators suggest that Noah didn't know that this wine would make him drunk; they suggest that somehow the atmospheric conditions before the Flood might not have allowed wine to become so strong before, and that Noah sort of accidentally got drunk. After all, this is the first mention of alcohol in the Bible. I don't subscribe to that theory at all. The point of the passage is that Noah failed here. Maybe the thoughts about all that had been lost had gotten him to the point where he decided he just wanted to forget all about the pain, at least for a little while. The problems

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<sup>1</sup> One need look no further than <http://www.eugenics.net>.

with alcohol are many and well-documented, and I'm not going to engage a full debate here today; rather, I simply want to point out that alcohol is a deceiver, as is constantly revealed in both our own experience and in the Bible at large. Alcohol promises short-term pleasure but delivers long-term pain and suffering and misery; and the full extent of alcohol-fueled suffering across the ages can never be calculated. Make no mistake: alcohol has its uses as a solvent, as a means of suspending medication, and as a disinfectant, but its primary use of consumption for pleasure is a mockery of true pleasure that brings suffering to those who abuse it. Noah abused it, and ended up, as many have since, in a stupor that brought him great shame and embarrassment.

*And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.*

*And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid it upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.*

The character of Noah's three sons is succinctly revealed in these verses. Ham took pleasure in the humiliation of his father, but Shem and Japheth were concerned for their father. That is the unmistakable message of these verses, but we need to address a few misconceptions that have sprung up about them.

The first misconception is that Ham committed some immoral act. The verb "saw" conveys a sense of pleasure. The phrase "the nakedness of his father" has been construed by some to mean that he had an affair with his own mother, or that he committed some terrible, immoral act upon his father. Let me assure you that there is absolutely no need to think of this as an immoral act. The verse means exactly what it says: *he saw his father's nakedness*. That's it. There's no need to overcomplicate it or add a meaning to the words. He saw his father's nakedness and he took pleasure in it, not a lustful pleasure, but rather a pleasure born of rebellion. He saw his father as a hypocrite, and he apparently was happy about that because it justified his own desire to break the rules. Now that the family ruler had failed, he could release his own hidden desires and inhibitions.

Shem and Japheth took a different view. Ham apparently expected his brothers to feel as he did, and that they too would want to break down the system of family leadership so that they too could be their own men, controlling their own destinies. However, they rushed to their father's dwelling for an entirely different reason: they wanted to end the embarrassment and cover their father's mistake. They went into the tent backwards so that they could cover their father properly without viewing him in his embarrassing position.

The next two verses bring us to another portion that has been widely misunderstood, even to this day. But wait! Did you notice that little phrase up there in verse 22? "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw..." We're finally getting to the reason for that:

*And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.*

*And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.*

This is the basis for the so called Curse of Ham, which is actually quite a misnomer since it is a curse on Ham's son, Canaan. There have been some who have taught that black people descended from Ham,

and that therefore it was justified in Scripture to treat black people badly and use them as slaves. In fact, I have a study Bible which was first published and became popular about an hundred years ago, and is still published today, which contains this footnote for these verses: “A prophetic declaration is made that from Ham will descend an *inferior and servile posterity* (emphasis added).”<sup>2</sup> However, the curse is not on Ham, but on Canaan; not all of Ham’s descendants are black, and the Canaanites certainly were not black at all; there is nothing at all here about Canaan being inferior; and finally, slavery as we had here in America is a far cry from the slavery of the ancient world in that it was much harder here and in that the slaves had no income and no rights here. Slavery is not really a subject we’re going to address today, though.<sup>3</sup>

We will find the fulfillment of this prophecy later in Scripture, when the children of Israel enter the Promised Land, which is inhabited by (\*trumpet fanfare\*) *Canaanites*. The children of Israel enter the Land of Canaan and dispossess the inhabitants, some of whom become the “hewers of wood and drawers of water” for the tabernacle (Joshua 9:27). What we find is that the Canaanites were among the most morally depraved people in recorded history. They were the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, and they were the ones who caused their children to “pass through the fire,” as we read about over and over throughout the Old Testament. “Passing through the fire” is a euphemism for child sacrifice, an horrible pagan practice. The Canaanites worshiped Baal and Ashtaroth with immoral fertility rituals.

At this point I think it becomes clear why Moses repeats for us that Ham is the father of Canaan. Moses is exposing for the children of Israel the historical background of the wickedness of the Canaanites. The Canaanites didn’t just spring up out of the ground and begin all these wicked practices; no, there is an historical process at work.

Now, the question arises, Is Noah punishing Canaan for Ham’s sin? No, not at all. You see, Noah sees in Canaan the rebellion of his father, but in greater measure. Noah pronounces over Canaan a curse that finds fulfillment through Canaan’s own rebellion, passed on to his descendants.

There is a powerful lesson for fathers here. Dr. Mark Cronmeyer, the administrator of the first school in which I taught, used to say, “What parents allow in moderation, children will carry to excess.” If we have a moral weakness which we think is a small thing, there is a good chance we’ll see it magnified in our children. If we allow a little alcohol in our lives, how can we think our children will not? If we play the lottery, how can we expect our children to be responsible with their money? This is the lesson of Ham and Canaan. Ham was rebellious, but he repressed that rebellion until he had a chance to gloat over his father’s failure. Canaan was more rebellious than Ham, and more openly so. Noah, observing this trait in Canaan, made a prophetic utterance over him.

Ham received no curse, but notice that he missed the blessing given to his brothers.

*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.*

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2 C. I. Scofield, *Scofield Reference Bible*, 1909, 1917. These notes are now public domain, and this particular note can be viewed at [http://www.studylight.org/com/srn/view.cgi?book=ge&chapter=9#Ge9\\_1](http://www.studylight.org/com/srn/view.cgi?book=ge&chapter=9#Ge9_1).

3 Paul Taylor and Bodie Hodge, “Slavery and the Bible.” Answers in Genesis website, February 29, 2007. Available at <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/feedback/2007/0202.asp>.

*And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years.*

*And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.*

Shem and Japheth receive a prophetic utterance over their families. We'll begin to see these unfold when we explore Genesis 10 and 11, but in very brief form we could say that the curse of Canaan was fulfilled when the Israelites, descendants of Shem, conquered the Land of Canaan.

The Bible records the true history of the world, and within its pages we find the only answer to racism: we are all made of "one blood." The curse of Canaan reveals, not a justification for slavery, but rather a lesson in fatherhood: "What we allow in moderation, our children will carry to excess." If we as Christians can grab ahold of these two powerful truths, we can make a difference in our families and in our world.