

# My Three Sons

## *New Adam, Same Result*

<sup>18</sup> The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.)

<sup>19</sup> These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.

<sup>20</sup> Noah began to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard.

<sup>21</sup> He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.

<sup>22</sup> And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.

<sup>23</sup> Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

<sup>24</sup> When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him,

<sup>25</sup> he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers."

<sup>26</sup> He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.

<sup>27</sup> May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant."

<sup>28</sup> After the flood Noah lived 350 years.

<sup>29</sup> All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

Genesis 9:18-29

## What a Good Boy

He was a **righteous man** (**Gen 6:9**)—just, law-abiding, and honest.<sup>1</sup> He was **blameless in his generations** (**6:9**)—not blind or lame or disfigured, not a hunchback or broken bone or a dwarf, no eczema or scabs or crushed parts (**Lev 21:18-20**).<sup>2</sup> He was a perfect human specimen after his kind.<sup>3</sup> He **walked with God** (**Gen 6:9**). He did justice, and loved kindness (**Micah 6:8**). He feared God and shunned evil. In all these ways he was like his great ancestor, Adam, prior to the fall in the Garden. In the same way, before anything else takes place, when all we know about him are these things, God establishes his covenant with this man (**Gen 6:18**), even as he did with his Father and all of creation before him in **Genesis 1-2**.

Yet, **he found grace in the eyes of the LORD** (**Gen 6:8**). Adam did not need grace, for he had not yet sinned. What since would grace even make prior to the fall? But this man **found grace**. This is a vital difference and key to

---

<sup>1</sup> Using the word as it is defined in lexicons.

<sup>2</sup> When we saw this word previously, we noticed how it refers to unblemished sacrificial animals most of the times it is used by Moses. The word is *tamim*. This word is parallel with *mum* and even translated the same way in **Lev 22:19-20** NAS. *Mum* is the word used of the priests who were not to have any physical problems of the kinds listed above (**Lev 21:18-20**).

<sup>3</sup> In contrast to the Nephilim of **Gen 6:4** who are the products of angelic males and human women.

understanding this man and his God today. Also, and ironically, this man “**did all that God commanded him**” (**Gen 6:22; 7:5**). Adam didn’t do that. Rather, at the first opportunity he fell into great sin.

It is because sin entered the world that our man needed grace. And yet, through this same man, it was prophesied that he would bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands (**Gen 5:29**). He would bring relief, for his name was **Noah**—Rest. Through him, God’s wrath would come to rest as an ark landed on the mountains, the first land that appeared after the earth’s return to the chaos and void created by the all-enveloping waters of the flood.

But then, **God remembered Noah** (**Gen 8:1**). He did not leave him to perish in that boat filled with bleating and roaring, stink and rot. God’s wrath did subside, it was put to rest. And our obedient hero opened the window of his boat-temple and sent for the **bird** to hover over the waters of a new creation (**Gen 8:7-12**). It brought back an olive branch, a sign of peace from God.

Then, out of thankfulness and expectation of the future, Noah built an **altar** to the LORD, and offered a burnt offering (**8:20**). The smell pleased the LORD; the sacrifice soothed his anger. Thus, God started over with this new

Adam. He blessed him saying, “be fruitful and multiply” (9:1). Genesis 1 is returning. He gave him not only green plants, but everything for food (9:3), expanding the food supply from the original creation. He gave man laws which would be used to curb sin and uphold the image of God which was not destroyed, but only shattered and now reaffirmed (9:6). And God re-established his covenant, confirming his common grace to creation (9:9), but adding in that promise of the gracious covenant made with Eve after she fell into sin, that there would be a coming Seed through which God would work redemption.

What a great man!

What a perfect replacement!

What a way to start over!

## Or Not

And then Noah came down off his Rocky Mountain High.

Today we are looking at the only thing we know about Noah after he came off the ark and down the mountain. Like Adam, it is the first thing he seems to do after God establishes him. It is a remarkable story for what it says about Noah, what it says about humanity, what it says about redemptive

history, how it sets up the great conflicts of the Old Testament, and most of all how it carries along the storyline of grace that began in **Genesis 3:15**.

We are in **Genesis 9:18-27**. The first thing to do is put it into its (literary) context. If you will remember, **Genesis 6:9-9:19** formed a huge chiasm with a middle point being “**God remembered Noah**.” We can call this section the body of the story, or to use a musical term the main **movement** of a great symphony.

A good piece of music will begin with some kind of a catchy motif (I often tell my wife that all I need are the right combination of notes for just two measures, eight little quarter-beats, that’s all, and I’ll be a millionaire. That’s the essence of pop-music). Think of Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony and its opening **four notes**. The **motif** of the Bible’s flood movement begins with those memorable and fantastically strange opening **four verses** of Genesis 6. But any good movement also comes to a climactic end. This is called the **coda**, and Beethoven was infamous for them, because his codas seem to last as long as the movement itself. They just go on and on and on. Our passage today is the coda of the flood movement.

And yet, this flood movement is part of the larger symphony. The symphony began in **Genesis 1:1**. That verse gave us the first movement of the symphony that took us from creation and covenant to fall to promise. But the flood movement is taking us to a new creation with the re-establishment of older motifs and covenants. The story today, the coda of the flood movement is remarkable because it now returns us to the fall part of the opening movement with Adam and Eve, by showing us that the new Adam is actually no different than the first. So I've said that it all starts so well with Noah, and then he comes off the mountain.

## **My Three Sons And the Fall of a New Adam**

### *Shem, Ham, Japheth*

Our passage begins by completing the chiasm that began in **Genesis 6:9-10**. There it said, “**And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.**” Our passage opens by saying, “**The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan). These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed**” (**Gen 9:18-19**). These verses not only complete the chiasm, but they also transition us to our story today, as well as to the long genealogies given in the Table of Nations (**Gen 10**). These are Noah's three sons.

Yet, I think they also do something else. They point us backward to Adam. If you will remember, Adam also had three sons. Notice that in our story today, Ham has a son who is called out. His name is **Canaan**. Ham will become the bad guy in our story. Yet, if you remember, Cain, the bad guy in **Genesis 4-5** has one particular son that is also called out. His name was **Lamech**. Thus, you get an interesting parallel with both of these men's three sons:

Sons of Adam	Sons of Noah
Cain (Lamech)	Ham (Canaan)
Abel	Japheth
Seth	Shem <sup>4</sup>

This is more than just an interesting observation. As we've seen, there are many things in **Genesis 8-9** that point us back to **Genesis 1-2**. Now what we are being pointed back to is **Genesis 3-4** and the fallen world. And this is the main context that we must read the rest of our story in today.

---

<sup>4</sup> The ages of Noah's sons do not seem to correspond to the ages of Adam's. Adam's sons were born in the order of Cain, Abel, and Seth. This is clear from the text. However, the ages of Noah's sons are disputed. Ham (implied) is said to be the youngest son (**9:24**). The KJV of **10:21** calls Japheth "the older" of he and Shem, but the grammar is ambiguous; this is merely a translation. Here, the order might be: Japheth, Shem, Ham. Yet, the order of the appearance of the names is usually: Shem, Ham, Japheth. **Jubilees 4:33** has this order for their respective ages. Yet, when going into the genealogies of each son in Genesis 10, they appear in reverse order.

## Continuing Motifs

What I want to look at now are a series of repetitions in this strange story of Noah that take us back to Adam and Cain. I'll just mention what they are in the order that they appear. First, it says that Noah **began to be a man of the soil** (**Gen 9:20**). The word “soil” is *adamah*—“ground” or “earth.” Remember, that Adam was created from the *adamah*. And it implies that God created him to become a tender of the earth (**2:5, 15**). Similarly, Cain becomes a worker of the *adamah* (**4:2**).<sup>5</sup>

Next it says that Noah “**planted a vineyard**” (**9:20**). The Adam story deals with plants/planting. God plants trees (**2:8**). Cain brings his plants as a food offering (**4:3**). Then it says that **Noah drank the wine** (**9:21**). Wine comes from a grape, and the grape is fruit. Cain offers the “**fruit**” (*peri*) of the ground (**4:3**). Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit (*peri*; **3:6**). Most of us think of this fruit as an apple, because we unconsciously steal the story from the Greek and Norse myths.<sup>5</sup> Curiously, the Rabbis speculated that this fruit was actually a grape. One of the reasons is because of our story today.

---

<sup>5</sup> See the beginning of the sermon “The Temptation” (**Genesis 3:1-6**) for sources.



Next it says that “Noah lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father” (9:21-22). Nakedness is a motif that we saw with Adam and Eve (2:25; 3:1). Then there is an impropriety that has something to do with the nakedness (9:22) which then needs to be “covered” (9:23). Adam and Eve also tried to “cover” their nakedness (3:7), but only Christ could do it properly (3:21).

Next, Noah awakes from his drunken stupor and “knows” what his youngest son had done to him (9:24). The theme of knowledge is at the heart of the Adam story (2:9; 3:5). After they sinned, Adam and Eve “know” that they are naked (3:7). Curiously, after Cain murders his brother, he says “I do not know” where he is (4:9). Obviously, the kind of knowledge we are talking about has to do with sin.

Once Noah finds out what happened, there is a curse (9:25). If you remember, God curses the serpent (3:14) and Adam (3:17). Then he curses Cain (4:11). Yet after this, Noah ends up blessing his other sons, and it is through this blessing that the promise of the Seed (3:15) will come through Shem (9:26-27). Finally, at the end Noah dies (9:28-29). The same thing happens to Adam (5:5) and (presumably) Cain (4:17). That’s a lot of similarity going on, and it is not accidental here

anymore than it is earlier in the flood story with all of its comparisons with Genesis 1-2. That means, as we try to understand our story today, we must be keeping in mind greater themes than just Noah and his three sons.

## Comparing Stories

MOTIF	ADAM	CAIN	NOAH
human being and earth plant and produce	Adam/ God plants;	God-human partnership;	human being plants;
	fruit of the tree	produce of the earth	wine is human-made product
prohibition	God prohibits sin explicitly	God does not describe the sin	no prohibition
warning	God warns of punishment explicitly	God warns generally; does not describe punishment	no warning
seduction to sin	external seducer—serpent and Eve	personified internal seducer—“sin”	no seducer
nakedness/sexuality	nakedness/suggestion of sexuality	-----	nakedness/intimation of sexual violation
who is sinned against	God	human being (and God)	human being (Ham’s sin); self (Noah)
sin and knowledge	sin involves gaining of knowledge	sin involves denial of knowledge	sin involves loss of knowledge
accusation by God	God questions, then accuses	God questions, then accuses	-----
initial response to God	Adam hides from God; hides his sin; blames Eve and (implicitly) God	Cain denies responsibility	-----
who pronounces punishment	God pronounces punishment and enacts it	God pronounces punishment; Cain amplifies on this; fear that human being will punish	human being punishes (Noah punishes Ham; Noah brings consequences upon himself)
banishment	from God	from earth (Cain adds—from God and humanity)	----- (later, the sin of Ham’s descendants will not be tolerated by the land)

nature of punishment	related to sin	consequence of sin	direct consequence of sin
impact on earth	earth is cursed	Cain is cursed from the earth	----- (possible release from earth's curse implied in vineyard)
who pronounces	God	God	Noah
curse the person's final response	-----	Cain recognizes guilt	Noah takes charge
sexual knowledge and new generations	Adam knows Eve; they bear Cain and Abel	Cain knows his wife; they bear Enoch	implication of sexual knowledge with son; none with wife; the genealogy of Noah's family <sup>6</sup>

### *Ham and His Father's Nakedness*

At this point, I want to look at the “fall” of Noah, for surely given the parallels with Adam, that is what this story is. **Noah is a new Adam**, not only in God starting the world of mankind over with him, but in the kind of man he turns out to be. It should strike you as extremely strange that given just about the only thing we know about Noah thus far, this story is what comes immediately after the flood. Again, so far in the story Noah is presented as righteous, perfect in his generations, walking with God, obedient, and religious in the best way possible. And that's all we know about Noah.

Then, as soon as he comes off the mountain, he plants a vineyard, gets drunk, lays uncovered in his tent, and something terrible happens. Is this not odd? Is this not

---

<sup>6</sup> Devora Steinmetz, “Vineyard, Farm, and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History,” ed. John J. Collins, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 197–198.

shocking? Yet, this is what the Bible does. Pretty much any time it tells us about some hero that we think we are to emulate (and sometimes we should emulate them), it jolts us away from hero worship, and therefore away from the pride that wells up in our own hearts because, “Look at me. I did what he did,” and points us back to Christ.

This is one of the reasons I believe the Bible is true. All stories tell some character flaw of the hero. But usually, the hero overcomes his flaw. Most stories, even when they give a flaw, nevertheless put the hero in the best possible light most of the time. But the Bible seems to go out of its way—not here or there, but every time it tells us about a saint of old—to show us that this is really not a good guy at all. Only once the hero is knocked down and the True Hero is raised up are we then able to see why the hero did anything good at all. And it is always because God is gracious (as he was to Noah), and because the hero had faith in Christ (as Noah did). But first, he has to be beaten down before our eyes. We have to see his sinful condition.

This is what our story does with Noah. First, it describes a series of events, only the last of which is actually sinful. He becomes **a man of the soil (20)**. As we saw with Cain, this is

actually what God created man to do. This is not a problem at all.

Next, he **plants a vineyard (20)**. Now, I know that some people will want to say something like this, “**Ah ha! That’s where he went wrong. He should never have tempted himself like that. We must stay away from all temptation for the sake of the weaker brother. Noah was obviously a weaker brother.**” That’s nonsense. There is nothing evil about a grapevine. God made them. Grapes are yummy and good for you, and do not even need to be fermented.

The third thing Noah does is **drinks of the wine (21)**. “**That’s the real problem. He drank alcohol. Drinking alcohol is evil. It is the devil’s elixir. You can’t be a Christian if you drink alcohol.**” This kind of thinking has been part and parcel of American Christianity since the days of Charles Finney. It may rest upon a sincere desire to see that people keep from sinning. The problem is, it is unbiblical. **Wine is both praised (Ps 104:15) and encouraged (1 Tim 5:23)** in certain settings. Not only is it unbiblical, but it actually turns Christianity into the very opposite thing that it is. It makes a person a Christian based upon what they do rather than upon faith in Christ. It subverts the law and the gospel at the critical point, so that Christianity is now no different than any other religion of

morals found anywhere. What's worse, it makes it a religion of **man's morals** rather than God's, since God never prohibits drinking alcohol.

Finally, it says that **Noah became drunk (21)**. Now **this is the problem**. Notice, he became drunk. That means there had to be **sufficient alcoholic content** in his elixir to make him ... drunk. I've read more than one Christian defense of staying away from wine that says in ancient days wine was basically like drinking grape juice. The story of Noah baffles me if that's the case.

This man became drunk. Everywhere in the Bible **drunkenness is a sin**. Most of the time wine is mentioned, it is in a negative context. This isn't wine's fault. It is man's fault. Man is too weak and he abuses God's gifts too easily. But again, that doesn't make wine evil, it makes man evil. Man is the problem. Woman is the problem. We are the problem. We are not to get drunk with wine. Why? Because it destroys our wits and we lose our knowledge. And when that happens, we open ourselves up to a host of evils. That is what happened to Noah.

It says that he lay uncovered in his tent (21). Then it says that Ham sees the "**nakedness of his father**" and this causes

him to tell his two brothers outside (22). What is going on here? This question has been the subject of much speculation.

For example, the *Reformation Study Bible* comments says, “Gazing at another’s nakedness, either in lust or scorn, is morally wrong. Ham’s scornful leering at the father whom he should have revered was particularly reprehensible” (notes on 9:22). The *NIV Study Bible* adds, “He broadcast, rather than covered, his father’s immodesty.” In other words, Ham looked lustfully at his naked father, and then became a tattle tale. Voyeurism has been a major view of this since antiquity.<sup>7</sup> Other views are the Ham castrated his father or that he raped his father. The rape view is of particular interest because of the story of Sodom and Gomorrah that finds some parallel themes with this one.

---

<sup>7</sup> E.g., H. Hirsch Cohen, *The Drunkenness of Noah* (Judaic Studies 4; University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1974), 14–16; Allen P. Ross “The Curse of Canaan,” *BSac* 130 (1980): 223–40; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 322–23; Gordon P. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 198–201; Joseph Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (ABRL; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 87; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (trans. I. Abrahams; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1964), 2:149–54; E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 61; Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 418–20; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion, S.J.; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 484–88. This is note 5 in Bergsma (see below).

However, I believe that these are really all just guesses. But we don't really need to guess, not when we consider that the Bible is a single symphony with many movements that work together. Here I'm thinking of **the Law**. The phrase "**the nakedness of his father**" is used throughout the OT, and in the words of Inigo Montoya, "**I do not think it means what [most people] think this means.**" **Leviticus 20:11** says, "**If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered *his father's nakedness*.**" That seems perfectly clear.

The problem is, it doesn't say Ham lay with anyone. Nor does it say he uncovered anything. Rather, Noah uncovered himself. And Ham "saw" the nakedness of his father." So, doesn't this mean that the sin was voyeurism, that Ham was the first Peeping-Tom? No, **Leviticus 20:17** says, "**If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or daughter of his mother, and *sees her nakedness*, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace.**" This is talking about the same thing the previous verse discussed. There is a reason why the story is using the language of "seeing."

Let's go back to Adam and **Eve**. Seeing is vital in the story. "**The woman saw that the tree was good for food**" (**Gen 3:6**). There are many other similar stories that use the same word in Genesis. In **Genesis 6:1-4** the **sons of God** "**saw**



that the daughters of man were attractive. And they took as their wives any they chose” (6:2). In Genesis 12:12-15, the Egyptians and Pharaoh see that Sarah is beautiful. At Sodom and Gomorrah, blindness is imposed upon the men by the angels because they have seen them (19:11). In the story of Shechem, he “sees” Dinah, the sister of Simeon and Levi, and “lay with her by force” (Gen 34:2). Potiphar’s wife “sees” Joseph and attempts to seduce him (Gen 39:7).

In each case after Eden,<sup>8</sup> sexual sin is involved. Most are different variations of sexual sin. But each involves “seeing.” Is this not a warning to us today in a world so filled with visual stimulation that we must guard our hearts? What is especially important to note is that all of these post-Eden stories are related genealogically. Two are Egyptians. Two are the people of the land of Canaan. One of those involves angelic rape and the other more than likely involves those descended from the Nephilim. This is extremely important to our story. But how?

Did you notice back in Gen 9:18 that it mentioned Canaan the son of Ham? What does he have to do with

---

<sup>8</sup> As many scholars note, the fall in Genesis 3 has the sexual current just under the surface, much the way lust is under the surface of many sexual sins. However, the story seems to go out of its way to NOT make it overtly sexual. Thus, drawing out this idea while tempting is nevertheless to go beyond Scripture.

anything? He isn't actually even in the story. Yet, he appears again in **vs. 22**, “**Ham, the father of Canaan.**” Then he appears a third time in **vs. 25-26** when **Noah curses Canaan**. What in the world is going on here? First, Canaan is the father of the Canaanites. His children are the people who live in the Promised Land and many of them are related to the Nephilim from Genesis 6 (**10:15-18**; and see the lists of these people throughout the OT that deal with giants). Second, in the next chapter we will learn that **Canaan's brother is Mizraim**, a.k.a. Egypt. So what this story is doing is setting up where the great hostilities between the Israelites and the Canaanites and Egyptians come from. But how does it do that?

Let's go back to what is actually happening in the story. First, when it says that Noah lay uncovered in his tent, it is possible that “his” should be “her” tent, meaning the tent of his wife.<sup>9</sup> This would clarify what is actually going on. Noah is not just disrobing for no good reason. He is very happy to be off the ark, and he is now going in to be with his wife to have relations with her. After a year on that ark, you can

---

<sup>9</sup> by John Sietze Bergsma, “Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan (Gen 9:20-27),” in *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124/1 (2005), pgs 25-40. Available online: [http://www.godawa.com/chronicles\\_of\\_the\\_nephilim/Articles\\_By\\_Others/Bergsma-Noahs\\_Nakedness\\_And\\_Curse\\_On\\_Canaan.pdf?.pdf](http://www.godawa.com/chronicles_of_the_nephilim/Articles_By_Others/Bergsma-Noahs_Nakedness_And_Curse_On_Canaan.pdf?.pdf) (p. 10).

probably understand both this desire for his wine and his woman.

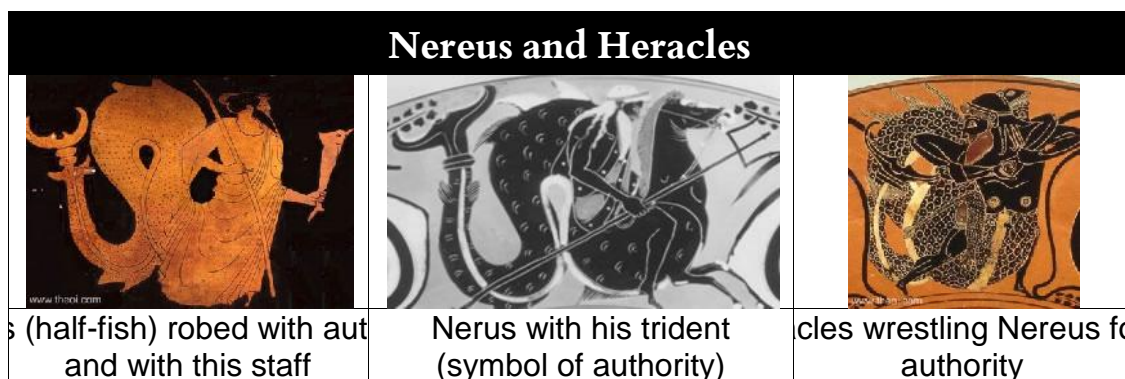
But he gets drunk. In his stupor, he passes out. Giving what seeing the nakedness of your father is, this means that Ham is not some innocent voyeur who just passes by and takes a second look. He seizes the moment, goes in to Noah's wife (perhaps his biological mother, perhaps not, we are not told), and has relations with her. Yes, it is disgusting. **But you have to understand what he was doing.** Friends, this is much, much more than just a sexual sin. Voyeurism does not begin to get at this. This is about power. This is about birthright. This is about the Promised Seed of Christ. And that is what makes this story so absolutely fascinating to me.

Why does Ham go and tell his brothers? What does he tell his brothers? Effectively, what he tells them is that **he has taken Noah's authority.** Here is where biblical symbolism must come into view. To be covered in a garment is to be covered in symbol of authority. In getting drunk and uncovering himself in his stupor, Noah was laying down his moral authority to govern his family.

Throughout the Scripture, a covering is an authority. Think of the priest's clothing (**Ex 28:2 NIV**) or the strange passage of a woman and a head covering (**1 Cor 11:6-10**).

Often, a man will take another man's woman in an attempt to steal his authority. Consider Absalom with his David's concubines (2 Sam 16:20-23); Reuben with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (Gen 35:22; 49:3-4); and David taking Saul's concubines (2 Sam 12:8). Ezekiel chastises the people for doing this as well (Ezek 22:10).

In taking Noah's wife, Ham is trying to steal Noah's authority for himself. In fact, this very thing may have a parallel in the Greek myths of Nereus: The Old Man of the Sea. In a fascinating theory, Nereus is Noah. He is often depicted as cloaked with authority. But this authority is wrestled away from him by Herekles (Nimrod?) or Chiron (Ham?).<sup>10</sup> Ham is saying to his brothers, "No longer will you regard Noah as the Patriarch. I am now your authority." Not only this, he is saying something much more profound.



<sup>10</sup> See Robert Bowie Johnson, Jr. *The Parthenon Code: Mankind's History in Marble*. Annapolis: Maryland, Solving Light Books, 2004. See also:

<http://www.solvinglight.com/features/37NoahsPartIV.htm>

What Ham did was get Noah's wife pregnant. Canaan is the result of this incestuous union. This kind of thing come up time and again in Genesis: The sons of God and the daughters of men, Lot's daughters get Lot drunk to have children, Judah and Jacob's concubine, etc. This now makes sense of why Noah would inexplicably curse Canaan. What in the world did Canaan do? He wasn't even there! Now we understand. Through Canaan and stealing Noah's authority, Ham was also saying to his older brothers, "The promise will go through me!" This baby is the Anti-Seed, the exact opposite of a child of the promise.

Authority is key here. Ham was a very wicked man, and his sins get at the heart of the problem that we thought was dealt with before the flood. Notice how Jude puts it, "And the angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day" (Jude 1:6). The next verse talks about the sexual sin of Sodom even as this one alludes to the sexual sin in Genesis 6. Then vs. 8 says, "Relying on their dreams, [they] defile the flesh, reject authority, and blaspheme the glorious ones." After the flood, Ham reinstates this epitome

of rebellion in the episode we are looking at now. This rebellion against authority and sexual deviation continues right on down to this very day, even in the churches of Jesus Christ, and this must not be.

### *Shem and Japheth and the Restoration of their Father's Dignity and Authority*

This is where the other two sons of Noah come into the story. Rather than join in their brother's rebellion, we read, "Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness" ([Gen 9:23](#)). The picture is very similar to that of God covering Adam and Eve. If Ham is the picture of brazen, sexual immodesty and authoritative rebellion, his brothers are the picture of humble [innocence](#) and [submission](#). They would not look upon their father in his drunken state, nor of their mother in her shame and disgrace, so they covered her, returning Noah's cloak and symbol of authority, and re-establishing themselves as under that authority.

If it is meant to be taken as a parallel to God clothing Adam and Eve in their nakedness, then it is also a picture of God's priestly servants covering the sin of their father and

forgiving him. It is a profoundly moving verse, and one that should be heeded by all in our day in age of pure and total rebellion against God, his church, his law, and his means of salvation. Let us be like these two brothers, quick to forgive wretched sinners, especially those in authority over us who do more than Noah did here—namely, repent.

### *Noah's Knowledge: A Curse and a Blessing*

At this point, Noah wakes up. He probably has a splitting headache from the night before, but that pales in comparison to **the kind of headache** he now faces. It says that the “**Knew what his youngest son had done to him**” (**Gen 9:24**).<sup>11</sup> Now we return to that theme of **knowledge** that we have seen previously. When Adam and Eve ate the fruit it says, “**they knew that they were naked**” (**3:7**). Lying to God's face, Cain replies to God's question about the location of Abel, “**I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?**”<sup>12</sup>

**What kind of knowledge is this?** One article says, “**Noah awakens from his drunkenness and achieves knowledge (9:24). It is this knowledge that allows him to exercise his**

---

<sup>11</sup> Most English translations says “youngest” son. However, the Targum shows that this is still not certain when it translates it as something like, “**Cham his son, who was inferior in worth**” (**Gen 9:24** PJE). See n. 4 above.

<sup>12</sup> As pointed out in a previous sermon, yada (“to know”) is also used in a sexual sense (4:1, 17, 25), which gives it an interesting flavor in for our story and the curse of Canaan.

moral agency. While loss of knowledge brought with it the violation of boundaries, with the sin of Ham against his father, the regaining of knowledge allows Noah to impose order within the ... human society which his family constitutes. For Noah, loss of knowledge is the state of sin.”<sup>13</sup>

For Adam, it was the gaining of knowledge that was the problem, for he could only gain his knowledge by refusing to submit to God’s authority. For Noah, it is the loss of it through sin. He was just given authority through the covenant, and now he deliberately sets it down so that it might be stolen by another.

But now, through the kind act of this two sons and through the recovery of his faculties after his sin, Noah is able to **make a right judgment**, which is exactly what we said the knowledge of good and evil was all along. What Noah does emulate God after the fall of Adam and Eve. First, the curses.

“He said, ‘Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers’” (**Gen 9:25**). Why would he curse Canaan rather than Ham? Now we know. He is the product of an illicit union between Noah’s wife and Ham. Now, this

---

<sup>13</sup> Devora Steinmetz, “Vineyard, Farm, and Garden: The Drunkenness of Noah in the Context of Primeval History,”

*Journal of Biblical Literature* 113 (1994): 207 [193-207].



curse will result of Canaan becoming the archenemy of Israel though out the whole of the OT. In other words, **this curse becomes the foundation of all the hostility**, the commands to slaughter, and the takeover of the Canaanites and the land of Canaan.<sup>14</sup>

This is the central focus of our story. For as much as it is about Noah falling as a kind of new Adam, it is also about explaining the players in the redemptive story of the Old Testament. But rather than finish with a curse, Noah turns to his other sons and pronounces a **blessing**. It is a fascinating blessing, and one of the more important couple of verses in Genesis.

“He also said, ‘Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.’” Given that Noah has just cursed Canaan, we would expect this to say “Blessed of the LORD be Shem,” or something like that. But rather than bless Shem, it actually **blesses the LORD**. This is a doxology, a **statement of worship**! This is marvelous, and demonstrates that though a fallen sinner in the likeness of Adam himself, Noah is a **man of faith**. For there is no other explanation for this statement than that Noah was a believer.

---

<sup>14</sup> Later, we see something similar in the births of Moab and Ammon (Gen 19:32-38).

Implied here is repentance, for without repentance, how could Noah make such a confession after what he has just done? It also shows us how any of us should act after being caught up in sin. We must turn to the LORD in worship. Worship is what we were created for, and it is the only thing that can bring about restoration, for implied in worship is a heart of faith, repentance, obedience, and love for God.

But Noah has something specific in mind and something explicit in his worship of the LORD. It takes a two-fold form and both involve his son Shem. The first part says, “let Canaan be [Shem’s] servant” (Gen 9:26). Canaan was going to serve both his brothers in the previous verse, and now a special submission will come upon him with Shem.

It is curious that the name Canaan means, “Merchants; trader; servant; low region; lowland; low; humbled; (root = to be humble; to be subdued; to be brought low).”<sup>15</sup> So there is a play going on with his name. But why Shem? Why not Japheth?

Well, part of the answer is that this is simply God’s purpose in election. In the story, both brothers submit to their father, both go in together and cover him. But one will

---

<sup>15</sup> Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 45.

get the blessing and the other will not. Knowing that God almost always chooses the younger rather than the older, my guess is that God chose Shem simply because it is part of a long history of God doing things the opposite way that we think they should be done.

So is he being chosen for? This is the second part. “**May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan be his servant**” (27). **Japheth means, “Enlargement; extension; let him enlarge,”**<sup>16</sup> so there is a play on words here as well. But for him to be enlarged, he has to come through Shem. He has to come into the tent of Shem.

The tent is seen earlier in the story, where Noah is drunk and naked in a tent. The tent is where he dwells. For Japheth to go into the tent of Shem means that he has to go to the place where Shem dwells. Later in the Bible, Shem will dwell as a wanderer in the desert where there will be a tent that he would erect where God would dwell. Later, Shem will move into the land of Canaan, Israel. More specifically, he will dwell in Jerusalem where a more permanent tent will be erected—a temple where God will dwell.

---

<sup>16</sup> Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998), 121.

I bring this up because what is happening here in this blessing is that the Promised Seed ([Gen 3:15](#); [9:9](#)) is being filtered down through Shem. We will see that Shem becomes the ancestor of none other than Abram, and much will be made of this in the next couple of chapters of Genesis. Curiously, [Shem means](#), “name.” What God is going to do is make for himself a name through Shem. We will see this especially in the Tower of Babel story.

This then becomes the specific reason why Noah worships God. God is to be praised because even though Noah has failed miserably, he has promised Noah a Seed. God will not fail even when all men do. Let God be praised and every man be a liar. He will work his promise through this son of Noah. Thus we see the continuation of the covenant here at the end of Genesis 9.

The story ends, though, even as the Adam story ended. Noah lived 350 more years, and when he was 950 years old, he died ([Gen 9:28-29](#)). You see, if God does not keep his word, if it is up to mere mortals to bring about a new creation and to create utopia on earth, it will end in ruin. Noah died because he was a sinner. Noah’s death could have meant the end of the promise. But God is faithful and today has given us his Unique Son who has been raised from the dead, has

ushered in an eternal kingdom, and is even now saving the descendants of Shem and Japheth and even Ham by his grace. These are the three sons of Noah. May you be found in the tents of Shem. Blessed by the LORD, the God of Shem.