

Blessing and Cursing of Noah's Sons

Genesis 9:18-29

Genesis 9:18-29 - *"Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. And Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was populated.*

²⁰ And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹ Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. ²⁴ So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him.

²⁵ Then he said: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren."

²⁶ And he said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant.

²⁷ May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant."

²⁸ And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years. ²⁹ So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died."

Background Notes

Noah lived 950 years - that's a long lifetime! How many of you would like to live 950 years? What!?! Everybody here is shaking his or her head, saying, 'No!' Well, I wouldn't mind living 950 years as long as I stayed young and healthy for the first 949 years!

Noah lived the first 600 years of his life before the Flood (Genesis 6:6), and the last 350 years were after the Flood. As far as the biblical record goes, all during this time only one sad event is recorded about him - and it's here at the end of chapter 9. Noah got drunk and unintentionally exposed himself. Ham, Noah's youngest son, saw his father's drunken stupor and nakedness, and evidently Ham mocked him. Shem and Japheth, on the other hand, didn't look or mock their father's nakedness. Instead, they covered their father by walking backwards with a covering, and placing it on their sleeping father. When Noah awoke, he spoke a prophecy which contained both a blessing and a curse - a blessing on Shem and Japheth, but a curse on Canaan (who was a son of Ham).

Notice that the curse was **not** on Ham, or on all Ham's descendants, but **only on Canaan** - that is, the nation of Canaan that descended from one of Ham's sons. This Scripture then has **nothing** to do with African peoples or black peoples, as some Christians have wrongly interpreted. It is a judgment on Canaanites (who were not black, by the way.) Years later, the Israelites conquered Canaan and subjected them to forced labor, in accordance with this prophecy. Other descendants of Canaan were subject to slavery by the descendants of Japheth (v27).

Why was the curse put on the Canaanites, and not on Ham, or at least on *all* of Ham's descendants? It's possible that Ham's son Canaan, may have been involved with his father in mocking Noah. Also, it may be that the curse was pronounced on Canaan because God could foresee the future moral depravity of the Canaanites. However, the mercy of God is shown as well, in not condemning **all** Ham's descendants.

Notice the blessing for Shem in verse 26: "*Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant.*" Now how did this prophesied blessing come true? God ordained the line of Shem as the Messianic line, from which would come incarnate Son of God.

Verse 27: "*May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem.*" The "enlarging" of Japheth is well documented in history. The world's greatest empires have come from Japheth, including the Greek empire, the Roman empire, the British empire, and of course the United States of America as well. The world's greatest empires have come from Japheth.

What does the phrase that Japheth would "dwell in the tents of Shem" mean? It doesn't mean that nations descending from Japheth would conquer nations descending from Shem. No, it means that blessing would come to Japheth because of the blessing on Shem - and that certainly has come true! Most of us listening to this Talk today are descendants of Japheth. We have found "blessing in the tents of Shem" because of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was a descendant of Shem. He was born in the line of Shem.

Doctrinal Points

1. God is dishonored by moral impropriety.

You know what "moral impropriety" means, right? It means to be morally improper. Noah was a believer, but he exhibited moral impropriety when he got drunk and uncovered or exposed himself. Ham was a believer, but he did something that was morally improper. Ham exhibited moral impropriety when he sinned against his father. What was Ham's sin? Believe it or not, some commentators go so far as to suggest that Ham committed a homosexual act, or at least looked on his father with homosexual desire.

I don't think the text says anything like that. Ham just happened to see his father in a drunken and exposed state, and rather than honoring his father by covering up his nakedness, he mocked his father. To make the situation worse, Ham tried to get his two brothers to join in his scornful leering and laughter. God expects children to honor their parents (Exodus 20:12; Ephesians 6:1-3). Ham dishonored his father, and in doing so, he dishonored God. Moral impropriety dishonors God.

There are a lot of ways in which we can exhibit moral impropriety today, especially in the family setting. Just as Noah let down his guard and dishonored God by getting drunk and exposing himself, so even godly parents today can let down their guard and exhibit impropriety by what they watch on TV, what they view on the web, or what they talk about around the dinner table. Parents, let's be careful to avoid moral indiscretion and impropriety.

And like Ham, children of all ages can exhibit moral impropriety by dishonoring their parents. They can dishonor them by speaking rudely, or laughing at them, or mocking and ridiculing them - especially behind their backs. Teenagers - a word to the wise is sufficient! The Bible teaches that children are to honor their parents. To dishonor parents is to dishonor God. Moral impropriety dishonors God.

2. God is honored by moral integrity.

Shem and Japheth showed moral integrity when they covered their father's nakedness. They didn't even look at their father; they walked backward with the covering. Because they honored their father, they honored and obeyed God - and God blessed them as a result. God is honored by moral integrity.

Are we characterized by moral integrity? If we are, God will bless us - as He blessed Shem and Japheth. Moral integrity starts with our own personal lives and it moves out in the way we deal with our family members, and then the way we interact with other people. The idea that you can have moral integrity in one area but not in another is a joke. You either **have** moral integrity, or you **don't**.

For example, a government official cannot cheat on his wife, with whom he has made the most sacred of vows, and yet somehow be characterized by moral integrity in his official duties. It just doesn't work, folks! If you lack moral integrity in one area, your lack of integrity will flow into other areas. It is a matter of character. Are we characterized by moral integrity? A life of moral integrity honors God.

Practical Application

In this lifetime, we are never immune to sin.

Genesis 6:9 says that *"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time."* Noah walked with God. And the Bible says (more than once!) that Noah did all that God commanded him. Who would have ever thought that we would read this sad account of Noah's failure in his older years?

Mature believers and older believers can sin! We are never immune to sin in this lifetime, no matter how many years we have been believers. So be careful - don't let down your guard! 1 Peter 5:8 says, *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."*

There are many examples in Scripture of mature believers falling into sin - when we would least expect it. Moses striking the rock in anger; David committing adultery and then trying to cover it up with murder; Solomon turning to foreign gods. Noah was a preacher of righteousness, the builder of the ark, a great man of faith - and yet he got drunk and exposed himself. All these believers were mature believers, yet they sinned. They were not immune to sin. We are **never** immune to sin in this lifetime!

We are never too old to sin - so we have to be careful not to let down our guard. Satan is seeking whom he may devour! Satan knows we are vulnerable, and by observing our activities, Satan even knows each believer's unique vulnerabilities to sin. He is just waiting for an opportune moment - even in our older years!

Mature believers, we've got to keep our guard up. Trust the Lord! Walk in the Spirit, depending on the Lord's to preserve us from a sudden catastrophic downfall. We are never immune to sin in this lifetime!