

THE BACKGROUND OF THE NOAHIC CURSE ON CANAAN
(GENESIS 9:22)

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Genesis 9:22 is the foundation and motivation for Noah's prophetic curse against Canaan. Yet, the exact reason for the Noahic Curse has been concealed, because of the sparsity of the narrative in Genesis 9:22. Many and varied have been the interpretations of this verse in the attempt to provide the needed information. In order to better answer the questions generated by the problem of lacking details in Genesis 9:22 it will be the intent of the author to present a more valid understanding as to what exactly happened in the tent between Ham and Noah. This result will then be compared with three prominent interpretations of the verse.

The process of coming to a better understanding of Genesis 9:22 will consist of an examination of the verse in its original language. Words of significance will be regarded for their exegetical, syntactical, and cultural value. This will provide for a clearer meaning of the text in that it will aid in removing any historical or higher critical presuppositions. The object at this point is to view the text apart as much as possible from any extra-biblical material.

Continuing, the Jewish View, the Liberal View, and the Conservative View will be considered as modes for interpreting the verse. Each one of these three views will be considered in regard to origin, content, and problems. A contrast will be drawn between the commentators of each of these three views and the understanding of the text as discovered in the examination of the verse.

It is the conclusion of this author that the Conservative View gives the best answer to the problems of the text. Competence arises from the fact that this view relies on a literal method of interpretation. This provides the most trustworthy data and thus is best able to answer the problem of the text.

Ham strictly looked upon the nakedness of his father. He then told his two brothers in a very conspicuous way. Canaan is prophetically cursed because this is the most efficient way to punish the original transgressor.

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Advisor

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INTRODUCTION

As it unfolds the early history of man, the book of Genesis seems to present just the essential facts. Additional details are usually excluded from the scripture. The writer seems to assume the reader will provide by his own cognizance the required data to expand the full meaning of the text. Perhaps there were some early oral traditions or written tablets that were common knowledge to the early Old Testament culture. These traditions or tablets may have provided the needed information. However, without this cultural understanding many passages in Genesis seem to be veiled behind a cloak of forgotten details.

As a result, these passages of the paucis verbis type have been interpreted by contemporary scholars in a number of different, often extraordinary, ways. Long standing traditions of interpretation have been built up around them. In addition more recent concepts are being constantly interjected into the traditional interpretation by the advent of ever-increasing linguistic and archeological discoveries. Having a continuous perpetual evolvement of these different interpretations of a certain passage, lines are drawn, and views are established based on the presupposition of the interpreter. Even though this may establish ground for

dialogue and discussion, it usually comes no nearer to the true meaning of the passage. This has been exactly the case for Genesis 9:22. Therefore to come to a valid understanding as to exactly what happened in the tent between Ham and drunken Noah is the goal for this thesis.

Statement of the Problem

The majority of the commentators realize the importance of the activity taking place in Genesis 9:22. It provides the background for Noah's curse against Canaan in Genesis 9:25. However, because of the limited details in this passage, scholars have done much by way of speculation in an effort to understand the full meaning of Ham's behavior before Noah. Seeking to grasp the reason for Noah's curse on Canaan, students of this passage have offered a diversity of suggestions and disagreements as to what exactly happened in the tent between Ham and Noah.

It is usually agreed that Noah took up the profession of husbandman. He seemed to direct his activities toward those of vine dresser for the purpose of producing wine. Authorities usually agree that Noah was either the first winemaker in the world, or he brought this knowledge with him in the Ark. Depending upon which position is adopted, it either makes Noah an innocent party to his own sin, or he was fully aware of the end result of his actions.

The Masoretes believed Noah was given the knowledge of wine-making as a direct temptation from Satan.

In Noah's defense some rabbinic sages, possibly to exonerate God of any charge of misjudgement of character, pictured Noah as an innocent dupe ensnared by Satan's strategem to revenge himself upon God for having exiled him to the earth below. Satan happened to come along when Noah was planting the slip of vine. He proposed that they become partners in the planting of a vineyard and Noah agreed.¹

Yet, this seems to be a product of tradition rather than from the text.²

Scripture does record that Noah drank the wine; he became intoxicated and uncovered himself in his tent. Then he became completely unconscious of his surroundings.

The text under examination simply reads, that sometime while Noah was sleeping naked in his tent, "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22).

The two brothers, Shem and Japheth, taking a garment, immediately covered the nakedness of their father. Furthermore, they took great pains not to look upon their father's nudity. They entered the tent backwards with their eyes diverted away from the nude body of Noah. This peculiar action of Shem and Japheth seemed to indicate that they were

¹H. Hirsch Cohen, The Drunkenness of Noah. (University, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1974), p. 1.

²R. Graves and R. Patai, Hebrew Myths. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, 1964), p. 120.

aware of some type of possible covert activity attributed to Ham. Because of this, Rabbinical Literature has put forth the idea that Ham did some shameful act upon or to Noah.

Noah lost his epithet "the pious" when he began to occupy himself with the growing of the vine. He became a "man of the ground." Ham saw him there and told his brothers what he had noticed . . . He added to his act of irreverence the still greater outrage of attempting to perform an operation upon his father designed to prevent procreation.¹

The text in itself, however, gives no evidence for this concept.

Near the end of the episode just before Noah placed a curse on Ham and a blessing on Shem and Japheth, he awakened, and the scripture records, "he knew what his youngest son had done to him" (Genesis 9:24). This statement seems to lend itself to a popular idea that Ham with his son Canaan did more than just see the nakedness of Noah. The exact nature of this activity remains a mystery. "It is probable that Canaan, Ham's son, did something disrespectful to his grandfather."² "Canaan did something not recorded

¹Louis Ginzberg, The Legend of the Jews. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1909), p. 168.

²T. C. Mitchell, "Noah," The New Bible Dictionary, ed. by James D. Douglas. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 891.

that was worthy of cursing."¹ Genesis 9:22 makes no comment on this concept.

Finally Noah spoke, placing a curse on Canaan. "So he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants He shall be to his brothers" (Genesis 9:25). Here lies the crux of the problem and reason for so much speculation on the part of many interpreters. This is the dilemma. If Ham, the father of Canaan, only harmlessly looked upon the nakedness of Noah, as Genesis 9:22 seems on first glance to indicate, then why did Noah respond with such a violent curse against Canaan? It looks as if Noah over reacted to the situation. Perhaps if more activity had taken place up to this point than has been recorded, then Noah's response might have been justified. Therefore, speculation has been the source to supply this activity. Unfortunately, much of this speculation has been generated in the mind of man and not from the scriptures.

Statement of the Thesis

This thesis proposes to show that the meaning of "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father" (Genesis 9:22), should be understood as Ham merely looked at his father without any concept of incestuous behavior on their parts. This activity of Ham was an external indicator

¹T. C. Mitchell, "Ham," The New Bible Dictionary, ed. by James D. Douglas. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1962), p. 500.

of his internal condition. Even though Ham was physically saved by the Ark, spiritually he was still lost. Ham took advantage of Noah's drunken condition demonstrating to all that both Noah and his descendants are totally depraved.

Method of Investigation

Since the problem being examined is associated with extra-biblical interpretations, the method of investigation is carried out in two stages.

Chapter One examines the basic meaning of Genesis 9:22. It is concerned with revealing what the passage literally says. The goal at this stage of research is to understand the fundamental meaning of Genesis 9:22 apart from any traditional interpretation. This goal is pursued on three fronts:

First, the exegetical characteristics are explored. Key words of Genesis 9:22 are examined to ascertain as near as possible their exact meaning. Their definitions prove interesting because in the original text they reveal more accurately the trespass made against Noah by Ham.

Second, the syntactical properties of the passage are observed. In a single grammatical unit, the passage will be scrutinized in its context. This is interesting because it supports the fact that Genesis 9:22 is a vital

part of the succeeding passages. Ham's trespass against Noah was still forefront in his mind when he cursed Canaan.¹

Third, Genesis 9:22 is examined in its cultural and historical setting. Using other Biblical texts and recent archeological discoveries, certain social taboos relating to nudity are explored. Furthermore, Noah's position as a Patriarch is investigated in regard to Ham's activities in the passage. In this way a picture is recreated that gives meaning to the action and reaction of the people involved in the episode.

Chapter Two is concerned with a classification and comparison of the extra-biblical interpretations. After the basic meaning of Genesis 9:22 is understood, these traditions can be compared with the meaning of the text and dealt with accordingly. The interpretations of Genesis 9:22 are channeled into three basic groups. They are the Jewish View, the Liberal View, and the Conservative View. Each of these views has its own problems and will be evaluated in relation to the literal meaning of the text.

Following this method of investigation, not only a basic understanding of Genesis 9:22 is reached, but also the background of Noah's curse is made apparent. This results

¹This concept has been denied by some authors. See Theodore H. Epp, "Ham's Sin and Canaan's Curse," Good News Broadcaster, Vol. 33, No. 8. (September, 1975), p. 18.

in a foundation on which to compare the traditional interpretations of this passage to determine their credibility.

Background and Limits of the Discussion

Because Noah's curse has existed for so long, much has been written about the subject. Obviously, most of this material cannot be included within the scope of this thesis. Only when adding pertinent information in coming to a valid solution to the problem will these circumferential ideas be considered. However, these concepts are important and deserving of investigation.

For example, much exploration is needed in regard to Noah's supernatural knowledge as he proceeded to curse and bless his offspring in Genesis 9:25-27. In these verses, the patriarch seemed to give in capsule form world history that includes events up to the present day. "The curse was not out of resentment for what Ham had done. Rather it was a prophecy concerning what would be true of Canaan and his descendants."¹ What was true of Canaan in receiving his curse can be logically extended to Shem and Japheth in receiving their blessing.

In contrast, some authors completely deny this prophetic characteristic of Genesis 9:25-27. They believe that Noah's prediction of the future was given after the

¹Ibid.

fact. ". . . It is perfectly evident from the narratives themselves that we have to do with tribes as in the case of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Ham and Japheth . . . narratives treating such ancestors are originally the experiences of races or tribes."¹

The interpretation of Noah's words may reveal some interesting concepts in regard to the future of the nation of Israel. Also, it provides some interesting accompaniment to the problem explored in this paper. However, the meaning of Noah's words in Genesis 9:25-27 is superfluous to the main thrust of the thesis. The primary goal is determining the interpretation of Genesis 9:22.

Another peripheral problem that provides interesting background, but will not be pursued in this paper is the drunkenness of Noah. In Genesis 7:1 "the Lord said to Noah . . . for you alone have I seen to be righteous before Me in this generation." Scholars have tried to answer the question, "If Noah was declared righteous by the Lord, then why is he found drunk and naked in his tent by Ham?"

Some rabbinical literature attempts to give answer to this question by comparing Noah to the time in which he lived. In relation to the debauchery and corruption as described in Genesis 6, Noah appeared to be righteous before

¹Herman Gunkel, The Legend of Genesis, trans. by W. H. Carruth. (New York: Schocken Books, 1975), p. 20.

the Lord. "Noah thus was the savior of mankind and the second father of the peoples of the world."¹ This concept greatly elevates the righteousness of Noah and de-emphasizes his drunkenness.

More liberal commentators, because of the apparent difference in Noah's character often deny he actually existed. Instead, they say "He is combined from perhaps two or three figures of tradition . . . the conception of wine . . . may reflect a nomadic culture that does not drink wine . . . it is doubtful that Canaan is the real villain of the original story of Noah's drunkenness."² In this way, Noah becomes a fictionalized person with his origins coming from ancient and undisclosed cultural legends. This may account for the unrighteous accuracy of the scriptural text.

A conservative reply to this problem takes a very literal view of the scriptures. "It is noted that Noah was perfect 'in his generation.' Among all his contemporaries, over the many generations of a long life, he was the only one, so far as the record goes, who had 'walked with God' since Enoch."³ Noah, it is admitted, did become intoxicated,

¹"Noah," The New Jewish Encyclopedia, ed. by David Bridger (New York: Behrman House, 1976), p. 335.

²"Noah," Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by John L. McKenzie (New York: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1965), p. 618.

³Henry M. Morris, The Genesis Flood (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), p. 177.

but because of His Grace, he was still considered righteous before the Lord. However, Noah's moment of carelessness did cause repercussions that resulted in temptation and sin for Ham. This interpretation seems to align itself best to the principles and meaning involved in the Biblical text.

These are just two of many interesting problems that are associated indirectly with Genesis 9:22. They do provide valuable background to the text, but do not relate directly to the activities of Ham and Noah in the tent.

CHAPTER I

The Flood had completed its destructive purpose upon the face of the earth. All animal and plant life was terminated except that which was preserved in the Ark.¹ Noah and his family after enduring the rigors of the Deluge disembarked from their vessel allowing the surviving animals to go free. With their salvation, came their gratitude and Noah built an altar "And offered burnt offerings on the altar" (Genesis 8:20).

God next gave a blessing to Noah and his sons directing them to re-populate the earth. Continuing with His instructions, God gave men the authorization to eat meat. Furthermore, He forbade the taking of human life by man establishing a precept for capital punishment (Genesis 9:6). To give credence to all these instructions, God formed the Noahic Covenant. He promised that never again will life or the earth be destroyed by a universal flood. The rainbow was created at this time to symbolize the Noahic Covenant.

With God's blessing and promise, Noah and his sons set out to rebuild human civilization. Noah began the reconstruction as a wine maker (Genesis 9:20). This begins

¹Whitcomb, John C., The World that Perished, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 42.

the episode that not only resulted in Noah's drunkenness, but the curse upon the offspring of Canaan. The reason for this curse was recorded in Genesis 9:22.

EXAMINATION OF GENESIS 9:22

In this scripture is recorded the activities carried out by Ham while Noah, his father, was drunk in his tent. Investigating the basic meaning represented by the Hebrew words in Genesis 9:22 presents a more definite image of the character of Ham. Also, it discounts much of the extra-biblical material that has tended to obscure the interpretation of Genesis 9:20-27. Upon investigating Genesis 9:22 it is discovered that Ham literally saw his naked father. Yet, Ham looked with such an attitude of rebellion and public ridicule he unveiled completely his unregenerate heart. "Ham saw the nakedness of his father displaying a lascivious bent of character."¹ This condition was much worse than anything he could have done physically to Noah. It discloses without a doubt that Ham was separated from fellowship with God. Ham revealed at this moment that he had spiritually severed himself from reception of faith, forgiveness, or God's grace.

This accounts for the meaning of "When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to

¹"Noah," Unger's Bible Dictionary, ed. by Merrill F. Unger. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), p. 797.

him" (Genesis 9:24). Perhaps Noah now had definite evidence from Shem and Japheth of his third son's lost condition. With this knowledge, Noah had adequate motivation to reveal for Ham the perpetual effects of sin. Beginning with Canaan, Noah pronounced the prophetic curse upon Ham's descendants that put them in bondage for generations. "Canaan will be the role of the most abject of slaves."¹

Noah's venture into viticulture provides the setting for the castigation of Israel's Canaanite neighbors. Ham to whom the descendants of the Canaanites is traced committed an offense when he entered the tent and viewed his father's nakedness. The offender is specifically identified as the father of Canaan in Genesis 9:22 . . . and the curse is strongly aimed at Canaan rather than disrespectful Ham.²

Lexical Considerations of Genesis 9:22

Hebrew Text

וַיֹּאמֶר חָם אֲבִי כְנָעַן אֵת אֲשֶׁר עָלָה אֶת אָבִיו וַיַּגֵּד לְשְׁנֵי אֶחָיו בְּחוּץ

English Translation

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.

The words "Ham," "saw," "nakedness," "father," and "told" are now lexically examined to determine their meaning.

¹Herbert Chanan Brichto, The Problem of "Curse" in the Hebrew Bible, (Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1963), p. 87.

²Dwight Young, "Noah," Encyclopedia Judaica, Vol. XII, ed. by Cecil Roth, (16 vols.: Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971), p. 1191.

In this way a clear understanding of the individuals in the text and their activities can be determined.

The Depravity of Ham

Ham is first mentioned in scripture as one of the sons of Noah in Genesis 5:32. He was probably a young man at the time of the commissioning of the Ark by God and more than likely aided his father in its construction. During this time, Noah is described as "a righteous man, blameless in his time and a person who walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). Noah's life provided for Ham along with the rest of the family, a testimony of a righteous life before the Lord. Everyone including Ham had ample opportunity to hear this "preacher of righteousness" (2 Peter 2:5). It seemed that up to this time Noah's family did accept their father's warning of coming destruction. This is evident in Genesis 7:1 where it is recorded that Noah's household including Ham entered into the Ark. At that time, Ham was not distinguished in any way from the other family members.

In Genesis 9:18, Ham is again mentioned by name. In this scripture a very interesting phenomenon takes place. Ham's relationship in the family was altered. He was definitely differentiated from his two brothers, Shem and Japheth. It is recorded in this verse that Ham along with Shem and Japheth had survived the flood, but Ham was also

referred to as the father of Canaan for the first time. When Shem and Japheth are mentioned as fathers of their descendants it is never in this manner, e.g. Genesis 10:2 and Genesis 10:21. This set Ham apart from his two brothers, and gave a definite indication of his failing spiritual condition as compared with Shem and Japheth.

In Genesis 9:18 Ham is described as "the father of Canaan" to prepare the reader for verses 25-27, where Noah cursing Ham for having told Shem and Japheth of his nakedness, refers to him as Canaan . . . It seems more likely, however, that the name "Canaan" is inserted prophetically, as Noah would not desire to curse his own son, but only one branch of that son's descendants who were later the principle adversaries of the Hebrews.¹

The reader needs preparation for verses 25-27 because before Genesis 9:18 there is no hint of Ham's unregenerate position.

With the advent of Genesis 9:22, the character of Ham surfaces and this reflects his behavior and status in the family. "Ham's behavior provides a key to the kind of training and example he would give posterity."² Furthermore, Ham's depraved standards were born out by the reputation of his offspring.

He was a connecting link between the antediluvian population and those who survived the Flood. Idolatry is connected with his name. Because of the impiety and

¹W. Ewing, "Ham," The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. II, ed. by James Orr, (5 vols.: Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956), p. 1323.

²"Noah," The Imperial Bible Dictionary, Vol. II, ed. by Patrick Fairbairn, (London: Blackie and Son, 1896), p. 403.

dishonor to his father, Ham is the transmitter in the renovated world of the worst features of idolatry and profaneness.¹

The Meaning of "Saw"

This word presents a particular problem to the text. **ראה** is used in such a variety of different ways in the Hebrew,² it is difficult to determine its exact meaning in Genesis 9:22. However, there are some concepts that begin to narrow down the meaning of "saw" in the specified verse.

For example, on page 907 of A Hebrew and English Lexicon by Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, Genesis 9:22 is sited under the definition, "look at, see by direct volition." From this classification it is evident that Ham's seeing Noah was a deliberate act of will. Ham looked at Noah in the same way that Joshua's spies surveyed the land in Joshua 2:1. Ham evidently took a long, hard look at Noah's nudity. "The word translated saw implies more than just an accidental seeing; rather it indicates a looking at or gazing with satisfaction."³

¹R. Manasse, "Ham," Cyclopedia of Biblical Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature, Vol. IV, ed. by John M'Clintock and James Strong, (12 vols.: Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 34.

²Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), pp. 906-9.

³Epp, "Ham's Sin and Canaan's Curse," p. 18.

A second classification in A Hebrew and English Lexicon proves interesting because it may give insight into the mind of Ham. Under definition eight the lexicon considers **נִחַן** as "look into with interest."¹ Under this classification is subclass three stating, "upon a spectacle causing anger." If Ham was a person with a temper and spiritually debased as disclosed in Genesis 9:18, then Ham's anger was burning against God as he saw God's Patriarch. This condition of anger deteriorated into hatred, discontinuing all fellowship between God and Ham. Even though Ham had been materially blessed before this time (Genesis 9:1), his descendants received only a curse, because of his climactic defiance against God. "Noah exposed himself to shame. When in this state he was the subject of severe judgment."²

The Septuagint³ in its translation of this verse uses **εἶδεν** for **נִחַן**. **εἶδεν** is the aorist active for **ὁράω**. This word, as in its Hebrew counterpart, has a number of different meanings based on usage.⁴ Because of this it is

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 908.

²"Noah," Eadie's Biblical Cyclopedia, ed. by John Eadie, (London: Charles Griffin and Company, 1901), p. 483.

³Alfred Rahlfs, ed., Septuaginta, Vol. I, (Wurttembergische: Bibelanstalt, 1935), p. 13.

⁴William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 581-82.

difficult to ascertain the exact meaning of **ὁράω** in Genesis 9:22. As a transitive verb **ὁράω** is defined as "see, catch sight of, notice or sense perception."¹ The Septuagint adds very little to the meaning of the word except to confirm Ham's physical act of seeing. Ham was actually present observing his father's nakedness. It was not a perception or activity taking place in Ham's mind.² Ham actually looked at Noah's nakedness.

The Latin Vulgate³ used the word VIDISSET to translate the word **חָזַק**. The meaning of the Latin word vidit is used frequently and has a wide range of meaning. It is defined as "he saw, beheld, observed, considered, appeared, showed."⁴ The Latin version gives further evidence that Ham saw Noah naked and that was the limit of Ham's activity before his father.

In spite of the great variety of meaning for **חָזַק**, it is evident that Ham saw his father naked. This may have stimulated his anger to rebel against God. From **εἶδεν** it

¹Ibid.

²Joseph Henry Thayer, Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), p. 452.

³Robertus Weber, ed., Vulgata, Vol. I, (Stuttgart: Wurttembergische: Bibelanstalt, 1969), p. 15.

⁴Joseph Frey and C. T. Samuel, Hebrew, Latin and English Dictionary, (London: Gale and Fenner, Paternoster-Row, 1815), p. 1249.

can be understood that Ham's seeing was a physical act, not a product of his imagination. Vidit, however, sets a limit to this activity. Ham just observed Noah's nakedness.

The Nakedness of Noah

The word חָשַׁף in describing a man implies a shameful exposure.¹ This word as it is examined begins to unveil more accurately the sight Ham beheld before the naked Noah. As a result, it gives additional insight into the seriousness of his trespass against his father and reason for the severity of the curse against Canaan.

The Old Testament scriptures speak much about the subject of nakedness, particularly in regard to uncovering a person's nakedness. For example, Leviticus 18:16, "None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the Lord." Then throughout the rest of the chapter, the scripture speaks in detail about the law against uncovering the nakedness of certain family members. Ezekiel 22:10 also records, "In you they have uncovered their father's nakedness: in you they have humbled her who was unclean in her menstrual impurity." These verses have caused some interpreters to conclude, "Ham loses his inheritance through his flagrantly unfilial act causing Noah to lose decency and

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 788.

honor."¹ Because of the usage of the term "uncover the nakedness," it becomes a euphemism for cohabit. "Possibly the narrator suppressed something more repulsive than mere looking (cf. v. 24 'what his youngest son had done to him'). Canaan is cursed for his immodesty . . . Israel encountered the sexual depravity of the Canaanites."²

Even though the analysis of the term "uncover the nakedness" is correct, it cannot be applied to Ham and Noah. Ham saw the nakedness of his father. He did not uncover the nakedness of his father in Genesis 9:22. "Nakedness" used in conjunction with "saw" conveys a completely different concept than when used with "uncovered." The phrase "Ham saw the nakedness of his father" does not necessarily imply a sexual offense.³ Genesis 42:9 records Joseph's accusations to his brothers as spies "come to see the nakedness of the land." Again he charged his brothers, "And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come" (Genesis 42:12). To apply some kind of sensual indulgence to Joseph's brothers makes the rest of the passage senseless. From the usage of the phrase "saw

¹Derek Kidner, Genesis, (London: The Tyndale Press, 1972), p. 103.

²Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, trans. by John H. Marks, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), p. 137.

³E. A. Speiser, Genesis, Vol. I, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1964), p. 61.

the nakedness of" in these scriptures, it is evident that Genesis 9:22 conveys that Ham only looked upon the nakedness of his father without doing anything else.

The Authority of the Father

Noah was the father of Ham. When the full meaning of ~~2x~~ is understood in Genesis 9:22, the horrendous severity of Ham's demeanor is brought into complete view in the passage. "The father is the center of gravity in the family: he is the baal, the provider and protector of his wives and children."¹

Noah was Ham's father and as a result Noah required, as family head, a degree of respect from his sons. It is evident from Genesis 9:23, Shem and Japheth were aware of Noah's position as their father. These men entered their father's tent backward with their eyes averted away from Noah. Both Shem and Japheth refused to observe Noah's nudity. They had no desire to even glance at their naked father and every effort was made to cover his nude body "so that they did not see their father's nakedness" (Genesis 9:23). Yet, Ham in Genesis 9:22 remained true to his defiled nature. "Ham despises his father in a way that

¹Isaac Mendelsohn, "The Family in the Ancient Near East," Biblical Archeologist Reader, Vol. III, ed. by Edward F. Campbell, Jr. and David Noel Freedman, (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1970), p. 144.

indicates that he has an unclean satisfaction in the nakedness of his father."¹

For years, Noah had walked with God (Genesis 6:9). He brought the family through the flood (Genesis 8:16) and served as their priest before God (Genesis 8:20). Now, Ham in viewing his naked father denied all of these facts in his heart. He blatantly despised the successful rule of Noah; he was brazen in his attitude toward his progenitor.

Noah was a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5), and Ham like his brother knew the custom by which he should treat his father. Temptation proved too much for Ham. He saw the nakedness of his father and when he disclosed his exploit he was ostracized by Shem and Japheth.²

Noah was a patriarch. Because of this distinction and Ham's spiritual attitude, his encroachment into Noah's tent became a transgression directly against God. As a patriarch, Noah was God's representative on earth. This greatly multiplied Ham's sin.

The father was recognized as both legal and spiritual head of the family. Wives and children were dependent upon the father or patriarch of the family, who also served as its governor, priest and magistrate. The family, including its slaves, was subject to the patriarch, who represented the sole authority, under God.³

¹Martin Naumann, "Messianic Mountaintops," The Springfielder; Vol. 49, No. 2, (September, 1975), p. 16.

²Martin Nauman, "Messianic Mountaintops," p. 18.

³Charles F. Pfeiffer, Old Testament History, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), p. 28.

As he viewed the naked body of Noah, the unrighteous Ham was exposing himself to the holy image of God. Exodus 3:5 and Exodus 19:12 give an indication of God's attitude toward an individual trespassing on His holy ground. Perhaps if he had continued in his sin and proceeded to touch Noah, God's Patriarch, Ham would have died.

Besides being the head of a family and a patriarch of God, Noah was also a prophet. He had a very special relationship with God in that Noah was given access to knowledge of the future (Genesis 9:25-27). In fact, after the Flood, this was his theocratic purpose in regard to representing God. "He was, in other words, an accredited speaker for God . . . Primarily, the prophet was one who spoke in the Name of the Lord. It was an institution of such men that God in grace established to convey His message to Israel."¹ Furthermore, when the function of the prophet is considered "as a protective against the abominations of Canaan"² Ham's violation against his father takes on even further significance. As he despised Noah, God's prophet, Ham was regarding with contempt the method and plan to preserve Israel from the destruction of his own descendants, the Canaanites.

¹Edward J. Young, My Servants to the Prophets, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), p. 75.

²Edward J. Young, My Servants to the Prophets, p. 76.

Because of the abomination of Ham before the Lord of seeing Noah; the father, patriarch, and prophet naked, there is little wonder for the curse against Canaan.¹ The Old Testament concept of blessing was in the context of material possessions for a man and his future generations. Therefore, in the case of Ham the most efficient method of punishing Ham for his iniquity was to curse the descendants of Canaan (Exodus 20:5). Yet in spite of Ham's flagrant attitude and treachery toward God, He was still gracious. "The curse applied only to Canaan and his descendants and therefore three fourths of the descendants of Ham are exempt from the curse."²

Ham Advertized His Exploits

The concluding function in Ham's seditious activity is recorded in the final verb of Genesis 9:22, he told. The Hebrew expression is **אָמַר** from the verb root **אָמַר**. This verb is commonly translated "he told" in Genesis 9:22, "Ham discovered the nakedness of Noah. He told his brothers and was cursed through his son Canaan."³ "Learning of his

¹ Arthur C. Custance, Noah's Three Sons, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 147.

² Richard L. Bradley, "The Curse of Canaan and the American Negro," Concordia Theological Monthly, Vol. 62, No. 2. (February, 1971), p. 101.

³ "Canaan," Bible Encyclopedia, ed. by Edward Robinson, (Toledo: H. W. Snow and Company, 1881), p. 230.

father's unseemly behavior, Ham informs his brothers."¹

"Ham entered Noah's tent and saw him nude. Then he told his brothers."² However, this only revealed part of Ham's action. "The word translated 'told' indicates telling with delight."³ The root definition of **אָרַן** is "to be conspicuous" but its specific hiphil use here is "to tell, announce, or report."⁴

This definition does support the type of behavior to be expected in a person like Ham. If he was spiritually separate from God, the type of action as manifested in this verb would be right in character for the depraved heart possessed by Ham. Being lost and hardened to all morality, Ham would take great delight in making himself conspicuous to his brothers by mocking God's representative. "He perceived his parent lying in his tent with his person exposed which he ridiculed."⁵

¹S. J. Schultz, "Noah," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. IV, ed. by Merrill C. Tenny, (8 vols.: Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 446.

²S. Barabas, "Ham," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. V, ed. by Merrill C. Tenny, (8 vols.: Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), p. 20.

³Epp, "Ham's Sin and Canaan's Curse," p. 18.

⁴Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, p. 616.

⁵"Ham," Bible Encyclopedia, ed. by Edward Robinson, (Toledo: H. W. Snow and Company, 1881), p. 476.

The exact form of this verbal abuse can only be imagined. However, it must have consisted of blasphemy, boasting and speaking against the name of God and His servant Noah. It can be assured that throughout this episode "Ham was not innocent. He continuously made fun of his father's exposure instead of covering him over to prevent embarrassment."¹ The reaction of Shem and Japheth seemed to be that of shocked repulsion to Ham. The scripture records that without speaking a word they immediately covered Noah going to great effort not to see his nakedness. Because of the deportment of these two men, the conjecture is made that Ham's language must have been atrocious. He must have made sport of Noah, and jeered at him before his two brothers. Because of the possible indelicacy of Ham's language, the Holy Spirit has not deemed it necessary to preserve within the scriptures Ham's exact words.

There is another aspect that must be considered in this episode of Ham unkindly deriding Noah before Shem and Japheth. Perhaps Ham was not alone in his sin. It has been suggested, "Noah shamefully exposed himself in his tent. Ham presumably led by his son Canaan made fun of Noah."²

¹"Noe," New Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. X, ed. by John P. Whalen, (16 vols.: New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1976), p. 479.

²John C. Whitcomb, "Noah," Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia, ed. by Charles F. Pfeiffer, (3 vols.: Chicago: Moody Press, 1975), p. 1212.

If this is the case, then this provides additional motivation for the Noahic Curse to fall upon Canaan in Genesis 9:25. Canaan would have been in the same lost spiritual condition as his father. His behavior would have manifest itself in the same way. Both Ham and Canaan would have been guilty of mocking God as they both took pleasure in ridiculing Noah.

Syntactical Exegesis of Genesis 9:22

The syntax of Genesis 9:22 provides further insight into the reasoning behind Noah's cursing the future generations of Ham through the family of Canaan.

Reason for the Curse

"And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22) is a causal clause. It gives the reason for Noah's curse upon the offspring of Canaan in Genesis 9:25. This clause reveals that Ham's sin operated in two stages. Not only did he see his father naked, but he found it necessary to ridicule the sight before his brothers. Ham is the subject of this clause and it was he who received the punishment for his sin. Ham was cursed through his son, because it was Ham who did the act of seeing.

The clause "saw the nakedness of his father" reveals that Ham only looked upon Noah. "No evidence can be adduced

from the expression . . . which is found elsewhere in the Pentateuch in connection with actual sexual relations (Leviticus 20:17)."¹ Any speculation beyond this fact does not agree with the syntax of the passage.²

Syntactical Unity of the Passage

Some commentators see a paradox between Genesis 9:22 and Genesis 9:25. They cannot understand the reasoning behind the cursing of Canaan for the activities of Ham. It seems very harsh to punish a son and his descendants for the sins of his father. This seems very unfair to them and they attempt to separate the activities of Genesis 9:22 and Genesis 9:25, saying Canaan was cursed for a crime against God that was unrecorded in the text.³ However, this interpretation is impossible because of the causality of Genesis 9:22. The syntax results in making Genesis 9:22 relate directly to Genesis 9:25. Genesis 9:25 is a result of the activities of Genesis 9:22. There is no real paradox involved with the passage according to the syntax.

¹U. Cassuto, A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1964), p. 161.

²Cohen, The Drunkenness of Noah, p. 13.

³Frederick W. Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan," Vetus Testamentum, Vol. 21, No. 2, (April, 1971), p. 233.

Cultural Setting

A complete understanding of Ham's action is impossible without a knowledge of the contemporary culture. Genesis 9:22 is basically about "a son of righteous Noah rejoicing at the chink he has found in the armor of this hero of God."¹ Yet, the scene in Genesis 9:22 can be fully perceived without the beneficial illumination of fundamental cultural information.

God's Social Order

The operating principle of God must be remembered. The Creator planned the Flood because of the steadily increasing wickedness of the antediluvian race (Genesis 6:5). It seemed for a moment from the human perspective that Satan was to have the final victory and acquire the world for sin. From the divine standpoint God's eternal social order was established for life from before the beginning of time. Since the first commandment, His creation was sacred and essential for the plan of salvation. This will ultimately result in the consummation of the Church in Heaven.² Furthermore, this social order began with the establishment of the human family on earth which is just as sacred (Genesis 2:24).

¹Naumann, "Messianic Mountaintops," p. 17.

²Ibid.

When the institution of the human family began to radically decay, so did social order. God considered it necessary to select one righteous man, and annihilate the rest of the human race from off the earth. This nullified Satan's intended victory, re-established social order, and allowed the plan of salvation to continue. Noah as God's agent along with his family was brought safely through the Flood.

Ham, inspite of the advantages of a godly father, continued to violate God's sacred commandments for social order by attempting to corrupt the only antediluvian family. The violation is described in Genesis 9:22.

The overall implications are seen in the current contemporary social order. There are still people like Ham who are prone to evil and easily influenced by Satan. There are also people like Noah, righteous and walking before God. The latter constantly offset the work of the former. Under God's divine plan, the Flood accomplished the purpose of curtailing the increasing influence of the ungodly. The Flood also provides complete assurance of victory for the godly.

Canaan became involved in receiving the family curse because of the activities of his father. Ham despised God's sacred social order. Yet, he was part of the family and Noah was reluctant to curse his own son. Furthermore God

had already blessed him in Genesis 9:1. Nonetheless, the righteousness of Noah before God demanded punishment for Ham. Canaan was cursed because, "Parents are struck most deeply in their children."¹

The Concept of Nakedness

Nakedness was greatly condemned throughout the Old Testament² and invoked a very strong taboo even in the early time of Noah.

The curse of Ham is, if we examine it closely, based on how painfully shameful and humiliating the ancient Israelite mentally regarded nakedness not only in a woman (Isaiah 57:3; Exodus 16:37; Hosea 2; 11; and Nahum 3:5), but also in a man (2 Samuel 6; 10:4; 20).³

The postdiluvian family consisted at first of only eight persons who had just been removed by the Flood from a very sensual society. As Noah and his family left the Ark, they must have been keenly aware of a relationship between sensuality and nudity. Even in subsequent generations the Jews objected vigorously to the exposure of the human body. Even for athletes, they insisted on a loin-cloth (2 Macabes 4:12, 13). Compulsory nudity was the extreme shame and

¹Claus Schedl, History of the Old Testament, Vol. I, (2 vols.: New York: Alba House, 1973), p. 409.

²Frank E. Eaken, The Religion and Culture of Israel, (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971), p. 218.

³Schedl, History of the Old Testament, p. 409.

humiliation (Isaiah 20:2-4; Lamentations 1:8; Hosea 2:3; and Nahum 3:5).¹

Ham's activity in Genesis 9:22 is a case in point for the cultural restriction on nakedness. He did not recognize the relationship between sensuality and nudity. This concept was not acceptable to his mind in its deluded state. Instead, Ham was just as sensual as those lost in the Flood and as those who were to be his descendants.² Looking on the nude body of his father was for Ham a perverted pleasure. This sight provided the excuse and stimulus for his rebellion from God. It also set the precedent for a portion of his descendants.

The religious level of this human family after the flood is revealed by the conduct of Ham, when he saw his father overcome by the strength of the wine, lying naked in his tent. He made fun of his father in the presence of his brothers Shem and Japheth.³

To restrict the sensual activities of later generations, God established the cultural taboo of nakedness.

The Cultural Concept of Looking

Culturally, the concept of looking⁴ is an unusual one when compared with the present day definition of the

¹Burton Scott Easton, "Naked, Nakedness," The International Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. IV, ed. by James Orr, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1939), p. 2112.

²Eaken, The Religion and Culture of Israel, p. 219.

³Schedl, History of the Old Testament, p. 408.

⁴Cohen, The Drunkenness of Noah, p. 14.

word. When a person looked upon another in the Ancient Near East it meant he identified or was attempting to acquire the possessions of that individual. For example, Abraham was given instructions by God to look over the land he was acquiring.

And the Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, "Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and your descendants forever." (Genesis 13:14, 15)

This seems to indicate Abram was to possess all the land he could circumlocate within the range of actual vision. This may indicate some direct link between seeing an object and possessing that same object.

Perhaps a parallel is established with the episode in Genesis 9:22. As Ham saw the nakedness of his father, the principle of possession was functioning. Ham as he gazed upon Noah was challenging the Patriarch to his position before God as the head of the family. This would certainly be in character for Noah's son who was at the same time in the process of expressing his defiance against God.

This cultural concept of looking gives additional weight to the soberness of Ham's trespass. It reveals that the penalty of the curse is in direct proportion to the seriousness of his crime.

Thus, defining the process of looking gives additional evidence to the fact that Ham's sin consisted solely

of gazing upon the naked body of his father. It exhibits that no further physical activity was necessary to bring about the curse.

Conclusion

The combined study of Genesis 9:22 lexically, syntactically, and culturally has assisted in coming to a more complete understanding of the text. This examination has revealed that Ham saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers. This was the full extent of his crime. Because of the grave implications of this activity, Ham's trespass is not to be minimized. The curse upon Canaan was fully justified. He, along with the descendants of Canaan, were cursed because this was the most effective method to punish Ham under the Old Testament concepts of material blessing and cursing. With this in mind, this paper will next consider the most popular interpretations of Genesis 9:22.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERPRETATIONS OF GENESIS 9:22

Many ideas have been offered over the years in regard to the exact meaning of Genesis 9:22. Commentators have attempted to grasp the information conveyed in this verse. The problem arises in the contrast between the apparent simplicity of the sentence and its undeniable importance to the context of the remaining part of the passage. Within Genesis 9:22 is the reasoning behind the curse on Canaan in Genesis 9:25. Yet, this reasoning is not completely distinct.

Traditional commentators¹ attempted to remove the uncertainty associated with this verse by resorting to speculative data to provide the necessary information. Though these efforts genuinely try to seek possible answers, they often do not speak to the specifics of the problem. Often confusion proceeds from the end result. "In Ham's sin lies the stain of the whole Hamatic race sexual profligacy of which Sodom and Gomorrah furnish an awful example."²

¹J. H. Hertz, The Pentateuch and Haftorah, (London: The Soncino Press, 1969), p. 34.

²A. R. Faussett, Bible Cyclopedia, (New York: The S. S. Scranton Company, 1910), p. 108.

Modern exegetes¹ are trying continuously to approach Genesis 9:22 from the aspect of its language and word structure. This has led to an influx of comparatively recent ideas on the problems in the passage. These scholars often undertake to glean the meaning of the verse from lexical and comparative word usage. This has resulted in a number of interesting ideas. These ideas often seem bizarre at times. For example, the phrase "to uncover the nakedness of" implies sexual intercourse as in Leviticus 17 and 20. In Leviticus 20:17 the phrase "to uncover the nakedness of" and the phrase "to see the nakedness of" are used in parallel. Therefore, to see the nakedness of in Genesis 9:22 implies sexual intercourse.

Applying this type of reasoning, Genesis 9:22 means Ham had relations with Noah's wife. Canaan was cursed because he was the fruit of this relationship of incest. Also, it is implied that a son like Ham who had sexual relations with his mother committed a rebellious sin against his father. The possession of another man's wife was seen as an effort to supplant the man himself (2 Samuel 16:20-23).²

¹Bassett, "Noah's Nakedness and the Curse of Canaan," p. 235.

²Ibid.

This argument neatly solves the problem of providing the needed information in Genesis 9:22, but it seems to be constructed upon a weak premise in logic.

With the results of the traditional commentator and the contemporary exegete in mind, it is the purpose of this chapter to consider three basic views concerning the interpretation of Genesis 9:22. These views reflect the response of many interpreters when they attempt to give an answer to the problem of what happened during the episode of Ham and drunken Noah in the tent. The responses of these interpretations are classified into three general categories. These are the Jewish View, the Liberal View, and the Conservative View. The origins, fundamentals and problems will be discussed in each of these three views.

The Jewish View

As to be expected, this is the oldest of the three views concerning the interpretation of Genesis 9:22. It has originated from the Targums and Rabbinical Literature. It is characterized with a large amount of extra-biblical material being built up around the text. This has resulted in traditions that have existed for centuries. "Origen mentions a tradition among the Jews. Canaan first saw the

shame of his grandfather and told it to his father."¹ This seems to indicate that even these early commentators were concerned about completely understanding Genesis 9:22 and were aware of a need for an answer. In order to satisfy this understanding, both Ham and Canaan are implicated in some type of sexual crime against Noah.

The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran

The Genesis Apocryphon reflects Hebrew tradition during the Intertestamental Period. These discoveries at Qumran make it evident that Noah was considered a hero during this time. The righteous aspect of the Patriarch was made prominent and his imperfections were forgotten. The whole episode of Noah's drunkenness was edited and revised by the free-working of the Genesis account. The final product is the record of a celebration between Noah and his sons with no mention of Ham seeing his father naked.²

The Targums

The Targum of Onkelos and the Targum of Palestine were written around 200 B.C. They place emphasis on the

¹Frederick Charles Cook, The Holy Bible with an Explanatory and Critical, Vol. I, (New York: Charles Scribner and Company, 1972), p. 81.

²Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran, Cave 1, A Commentary, (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971), p. 78.

fact that Ham tempted his brothers after the occasion of his own sin of viewing the nakedness of his father. This reveals the attitudes of the writers. They were principally concerned with Ham's activities in regard to alluring his brothers to sin. The Targum of Onkelos¹ and the Targum of Palestine² both support the concept that Ham did more than just look at the nakedness of Noah. The Targum narrates that Ham showed Noah's nakedness to his brothers and Noah knew of this incident through the revelation of a dream.³ The writer was interested in extending the impropriety of Ham's activities to justify the full punishment of the curse.

The Rabbinic Literature

Basing their interpretation on the Genesis account in the Pentateuch, earlier extra-biblical interpretation, and a certain amount of speculation based on the contemporary culture, the Jewish scholars of the middle ages purported another philosophy in regard to the problem in Genesis 9:22. They commonly agreed that Ham physically abused Noah by castrating him while he was drunk in his tent. In order to

¹W. J. Etheridge, The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch, (New York: K.T.A.V. Publishing House, 1968), p. 53.

²Ibid., p. 185.

³Adolph Brull, Das Samaritanische Targum zum Pentateuch, (New York: George Olms, 1971), p. 46.

implicate Canaan it is said Ham sent his young son into the tent to accomplish the deed.¹

Once this concept was accepted it opened the way for a number of other unusual interpretations. Rabbi Berekiah wrote, "But when Ham did what he did to him, he said, 'You have stopped me begetting a young son to attend me, therefore, your own son will serve his brothers, as they are servants of mine.'"²

Not all teachers were willing to accept the castration theory. Instead, they offered other reasons for the curse based on the idea of a son's respect for a father. "According to Tabari, Ham for having laughed at his father's drunkenness was cursed by Noah, that his skin should turn black as well as all the fruits which were to grow in the land he should inhabit."³

Again the principle of earlier Jewish commentators is the same. That is to maximize the sin of Ham to fit the degree of the curse against his son.

¹Cohen, The Drunkenness of Noah, p. 13.

²John Bowker, The Targums and Rabbinic Literature, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1969), p. 176.

³Gould S. Baring, Legends of the Patriarchs and Prophets, (New York: John B. Alden, Publishers, 1884), p. 137.

Present Jewish Scholarship

Much of the present day interpretation held in Orthodox Jewish circles comes from what was taught by earlier rabbis. Their opinions are accepted in a variety of degrees determining in a diversity of ways the nature of Ham's transgression in Genesis 9:22.

For instance, from the Midrashim comes the concept that Ham or Canaan emasculated Noah that he should have no more sons. This resulted in the Noahic Curse. Other Orthodox Jewish Scholars abandon this teaching and believe Canaan was cursed because he circulated a report that he saw Noah naked.¹ This latter explanation became defective when the Jewish sentiment against the cursing of an innocent man came into vogue. The most recent assertion is Canaan, like his father, transgressed against Noah.² Even through this is the current interpretation of Genesis 9:22, it does not give any detail explaining the transgression of the two men. This leaves room for further speculation.

Reformed Jewish scholarship takes a critical interpretation of Genesis 9:22. Being very close to the liberal

¹Louis Ginzberg, "Canaan," The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. III, ed. by Isidore Singer, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1972), p. 523.

²Ibid., p. 254.

view, they consider the story of Noah and the subsequent curse on Canaan a separate account from that concerning Noah the husbandman. It is completely unrelated to the story of Noah the Ark builder. Because of the disparity of Noah's character between Genesis 9:21-29 and Genesis 6:9-9:19 many critics believe the Bible is speaking about two different persons with the same name. Other reformed critics assert that the hero of the Flood could have been Enoch, **אֶנוֹךְ**. The confusion arose between the names Noah and Enoch when a scribe dropped a final **י** and transposed the two remaining letters.¹ A denial of the unity of the Genesis account, or that Noah was one person does not really attempt to give an answer to the question involved in Genesis 9:22.

Problems of the Present Jewish View

Even though the Present Jewish View is held in different measures by the large majority of Jewish scholarship, this view does have some problems.

The view relies very heavily upon Rabbinical Literature drawing very little from the exegetical aspects of the original language. It has very little direct relation

¹Max Seligsohn, "Noah," The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol. IX, ed. by Isidore Singer, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1972), p. 322.

with the text except through the Midrashim. As a result, it tends not to speak to the problem in Genesis 9:22.

This view reads into the text cultural concepts that are not really present in the episode. The idea that Noah was castrated by his son or grandson is never mentioned or implied in Genesis 9:22. The idea that Noah is two different people or his name was transposed from Enoch gives a false impression of Noah and confuses the problem without giving an answer.

Compared with scripture, some of the concepts in the Jewish View are far-fetched. It has extra-biblical characteristics that make this view incompatible with the Word of God. The Jewish View does not provide a clear-cut answer to what were the activities of Ham in Genesis 9:22 or what was the reason for a curse upon Canaan in Genesis 9:25.

The Liberal View

This view comes from the higher critical school begun in the last century. It takes a very low view of scripture as the inspired Word of God. The holders of this view deny that the whole episode recorded in Genesis 9:21-29 ever really happened.¹ Instead, this is the interjection of the

¹Charles Augustus Briggs, The Higher Criticism of the Hexateuch, (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1893), p. 291.

P into the J document.¹ "Genesis 9:22 is an example of the importance of a popular morality showing itself in the finer forms of consideration of the father."² The Liberal View considers Genesis 9:22 as part of a gloss and any interpretation can only be symbolic.

Idea of a Gloss

The Liberal View admits that somewhere in Genesis 9:22-29 there is a portion of the story concerning Noah's drunkenness that has been left out. This is because according to Genesis 9:24 Noah knew that he had had something done to him.³ This has resulted in the creation of a number of ideas attempting to take apart and reassemble the passage to locate the position of this unknown detail in the text.

The most prevalent idea to prove that not all the original scripture is present in the passage is to divide the verses according to the use of the names of God.⁴ "God is for Japheth mainly Elohim. For Shem He is Jehovah.

¹S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1891), p. 135.

²Walther Eichrodt, Man in the Old Testament, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1951), p. 317.

³Henry Frowde, Genesis, ed. by H. W. Bennett, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, American Branch, no date), p. 156.

⁴Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, translated by D. M. G. Stalken, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 186.

made by the addition in 9:18 "and Ham, that is the father of Canaan" to identify them.¹

The Curse on Ham

To solve the problem of Canaan being cursed for the unrighteous deeds of Ham (Genesis 9:25), the Liberal View relies upon the revision of a late redactor. The fact that Ham refers to Canaan is evidenced by Noah's cursing of Canaan for the actions of his father. This suggests that Canaan stood originally in all the passages where the three brothers are mentioned except in the verse containing the curse.² This renders the person looking upon the naked Noah in Genesis 9:22 as Canaan resulting in his reception of the curse.

Symbolic Interpretation

With the reconstruction of scripture, any effort to adopt a literal interpretation becomes impossible. Therefore, the understanding of Genesis 9:22 can only be understood symbolically.

The passage containing Canaan's curse is understood limitedly as part of "A capsule prophecy that sums up vast

¹Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction, translated by Peter R. Ackroyd, (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 191.

²T. G. Pinches, The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, ed. by James Orr, (Chicago: The Howard Severance Company, 1915), p. 1323.

movements of ancient history."¹ This effects the importance of Genesis 9:22 by discounting its reality. It becomes just another part of the symbolism contained in Genesis 9:20-27 represented by Noah's indulgence with wine.

Cultural reference is drawn based on the symbolism,

Drinking the wine put him into a drunken, debauched condition which led to what was regarded as a sexual abomination on the part of one of his sons, Ham, the father of Canaan. The passage is a pointed attack on agricultural Canaan (represented as a person), with its wine-drinking and sexual license.²

Symbolic interpretation is used in a historical framework.

Noah, we are told, was the first man to till the soil and plant a vineyard--the characteristic agriculture of Canaan, but his activity led to a revolting spectacle of drunkenness and nakedness, and Canaan, the son of Ham was cursed with a three-fold curse (Genesis 9:18-27). This nomadic reaction against the Canaanite culture persisted in some Israelite circles long after the time of the conquest (Jeremiah 35).³

The symbolism involved in Genesis 9:21-27 is expanded from the cultural and historic aspects of Israel to the culture and history of the world. In regard to the historical symbolism in Genesis 9:22 . . . "nations are bound in the

¹Robert Brow, "The Curse of Ham--Capsule of Ancient History," Christianity Today, Vol. 18, No. 2, (October 26, 1973), p. 10.

²Bernhard W. Anderson, The Living World of the Old Testament, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1957), p. 215.

³Anderson, The Living World of the Old Testament, p. 137.

sight of God by a universal law which brings them all within the sphere of Yahweh's operation as when the expulsion of the Canaanites is explained in terms of their sin."¹ Genesis 9:23 contains international cultural symbolism. "Certain requirements of modesty and piety are felt by all nations to be binding."²

The symbolism is very important to the liberal understanding of Genesis 9:22. Symbolic interpretation is the final product in the performance of the Liberal View.

Problems

The liberal interpretation of Genesis 9:22 and its associated verses is very popular in modern Christendom. It receives acceptance in most main line denominations. In spite of its great popularity, the Liberal View does have some major setbacks.

Being greatly influenced by higher criticism, the Liberal View denies the literal interpretation of Genesis 9:22. This radically limits the options available for the interpreter to come to a full understanding of the text.

A symbolic interpretation unfounded on the actual materials existing in the verse is the end result of the

¹Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, Vol. II, translated by J. A. Baker, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1961), p. 170.

²Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, p. 171.

Liberal View. This symbolic interpretation has the effect of orbiting around the circumferential issues of Genesis 9:22 without ever speaking directly to the central matters of the text.

The liberal interpretation of Genesis 9:21-27 is creating modern myths to supplant sound exegesis. This causes the circulation of a number of erroneous impressions about Genesis 9:22 resulting in the concealment of the existence of its actual problems.

The Conservative View

The origins of the Conservative View can be traced back to around the time of the Reformation.

To understand Ham's sin we must regard his malice of heart, or his hereditary corruption. As a son he would never have mocked his drunken father had he not put out of his heart that due reverence which children owe their parents according to God's commandment. As the ungodly world before the Deluge looked upon Noah with contempt and condemned him as a false prophet, so Ham mocked his father as a fool and condemned him as a transgressor. Regarding it from this viewpoint, we (readily) see how great was the sin which Ham committed against his father. He never would have perpetrated this abominable deed had he walked in the fear of God.¹

The Conservative View is characterized by a literal interpretation of the scriptures. This is the view recommended by this writer. It is based upon the grammatical exegesis of Genesis 9:22 and a cultural understanding of the

¹Martin Luther, Luther's Commentary on Genesis, Vol. I, translated by J. Theodore Mueller, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 173.

Biblical text. Ham literally saw his naked father and told his brothers, which resulted in the curse of Canaan.

A General Interpretation

Relatively unlimiting words like "provoked," "mocked," and "transgressed" are miscellaneously used by conservative commentators to relate the episode taking place in Genesis 9:22. "Canaan, who uncovered the nakedness of his father, Noah, is cursed because of his violation of shame (Genesis 9:22-25)."¹ "Ham behaved undutifully and incurred a curse."² "Noah uncovered himself in his tent and was found in that state by his son Ham."³ Even though these statements are true, they remain too general to reveal the specific activities of Ham in the text. Upon preliminary examination, this may seem like a shortcoming for the Conservative View. However since the original text does not provide the additional desired detail, any interpretation beyond the literal meaning of the passage by the commentators is empty speculation. It is to the advantage in Biblical

¹Walter Hans Wolff, Anthropology of the Old Testament, (London: S.C.M. Press, 1974), p. 179.

²"Ham," The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by Henry Snyder Gehman, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 359.

³John H. Marks, "Ham," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Vol. III, ed. by George Arthur Buttrick, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), p. 554.

studies to proceed from a solid foundation of knowing what the text does or does not say rather than to proceed from a basis of human theory and supposition. The Conservative View provides for this advantage.

A Concept of Human Depravity

Some interpreters especially of the Liberal View attempt to partially discount the fact that Ham sinned in Genesis 9:22. "Ham, quite by accident, came in and saw his father's nakedness, which is a sin whether intentional or not."¹ In contrast, the Conservative View admits the existence of the Biblical precept of sin when Ham looked upon the naked Noah. "What ordinary filial reverence should have restrained is given free rein. The unclean imagination feeds itself by gazing. But at the same time a measure of departure from the faith is also revealed by Ham."² To provide greater insight into the characteristics of the depraved human nature, the Conservative Commentator gives further evidence of Ham's sin. "Not content with finding pleasure in his father's shame . . . he must proclaim his disgraceful pleasure to his brethren and thus exhibit his

¹Cyrus H. Gordon, Introduction to the Old Testament, (Ventnor, New Jersey: Ventnor Publishing Company, 1953), p. 27.

²H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Genesis, Vol. I, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), p. 346.

own shameless sensuality."¹ The sins of Ham are lost in the Liberal View.

Under the Jewish View, Noah is recognized as a hero. His drunkenness and nakedness are often passed over unnoticed.² The Conservative View makes a full recognition of Noah's depravity. "He drank the juice became intoxicated and shamefully exposed himself in his own tent. Ham mocked openly at his father's disgrace."³ When the sinfulness of the Patriarch is admitted further insight is available into the consequences of his sin as other scriptures (Lamentations 4:21 and Habbakkuk 2:15) give comment to his inebriated condition.⁴ Habbakkuk 2:15 may have implications for Ham as the cause of his father's drunkenness.

The existence of sin in Noah and Ham provide a specific example to demonstrate the depravity in all the human race. "Drunkenness and lewdness appear in all human affairs

¹C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, The Pentateuch, Vol. I, translated by James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), p. 156.

²Joseph A. Fitzmyer, The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran, Cave I, A Commentary, p. 78.

³"Noah," A Dictionary of the Bible, ed. by William Smith, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, no date), p. 641.

⁴John Skinner, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis, Vol. I, The International Critical Commentary, ed. by Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer and Charles A. Briggs, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1917), p. 183.

(Genesis 9:20-27)."¹ Also, admitting that these two men were unrighteous discloses the fact that humanly speaking it is impossible for the human race to become righteous before God. "In this covenant, as in the others, there is human failure as indicated in Noah's drunkenness (Genesis 9:22)."² Righteousness is only attainable because of God's grace. This fact would be undiscernable without first admitting the existence of human depravity as does the Conservative View.

Conclusion

The Conservative View literally interprets Genesis 9:22. Ham was cursed through the lives of Canaan and his descendants as punishment, for "he transgressed because he did not turn away his glance, but spoke about the matter instead of being silent; he seriously offended against filial piety and natural modesty."³ The Noahic Curse was the result.

There are certain reasons for the acceptance of the conservative meaning of Genesis 9:22. The Conservative View,

¹James Oliver Buswell, A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963), p. 345.

²Lewis Sperry Chafer, Major Bible Themes, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 130.

³August Dillman, Genesis, Vol. I, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 305.

because of its use of the literal method in interpretation, proficiently represents the original language used in the text. It adequately considers the cultural customs and practices associated with the passage. It allows the interpreter to deal with the passage while forming the least amount of historical and theological presuppositions. There is nothing in the content of the passage that would warrant any extra-biblical theory and the Conservative View recognizes this fact. The Conservative View does not require any omission or addition to the text to give credence to the understanding of Genesis 9:22.

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY

Genesis 9:22 is extremely important to the context of Genesis 9:20-27. In Genesis 9:22 is contained the motivation for the Noahic Curse against Canaan. Because the verse lacks particulars concerning its content, it is difficult to ascertain and grasp the full meaning of the passage. Therefore, it has been the goal of this thesis to come to a valid understanding as to what exactly happened between Ham and Noah while he was drunk and naked in his tent. The text reads, "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22).

In these words lies the reasoning behind Noah's curse on Canaan in Genesis 9:25. If Ham, the father of Canaan, only harmlessly looked upon the nakedness of Noah, then Noah had no purpose in responding with such a burdensome curse against Canaan. Yet Noah did place a very heavy curse not only on Canaan, but on all his descendants. Therefore, it can be conjectured that more has taken place in Genesis 9:22 than upon first glance is obvious.

This conjecture has resulted in a great variety of speculations. To supply the missing information many

commentators have drawn from ancient Jewish tradition. Other interpreters have constructed theories based on a Higher Critical approach to scripture. A third, conservative group, has relied on a literal meaning of the text and used this as a base to glean data from Genesis 9:22. The interpretations of these three groups have caused the generation of much dialogue on the meaning of Genesis 9:22, without producing any decisive answers to the original problem.

Chapter One sought to supply a basic understanding for Genesis 9:22. Approaching the passage exegetically, syntactically, and culturally, the meaning of certain key words was determined. The passage was examined as a complete unit being defined as a causal clause. Then the cultural aspects of the passage were examined to provide an added dimension of understanding to the text.

Chapter Two made a division of the interpretations into three basic classifications. These were the Jewish View, the Liberal View, and the Conservative View. Each View was examined in regard to its origins, stipulations, and problems.

Because of its characteristic of a literal approach to the meaning of Genesis 9:22, this writer agrees with the conservative interpretation of the text. The complete activity of Ham's trespass against Noah consisted strictly of seeing the nakedness of his father and boasting of the sight

to his two brothers. This behavior of Ham gave a strong indication of his depraved character. Ham's external behavior was a reflection of the internal rebellious condition of his heart. Ham was spiritually lost, because he had spiritually separated himself from God. This separation was manifested in the attitude toward Noah, his father and God's representative to the postdiluvian human race.

The Conservative View affords the most advantageous reply to the problem of the apparent lack of information in Genesis 9:22. It aligns itself most closely to the literal meaning of the text.

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