

IT WAS THE WORST OF VINES

GENESIS 9:18-29 OCTOBER 13, 2021

Whether it's the tabloids or *TMZ*, the human heart loves to see the scandals of prominent people. What a sad commentary on our culture it is to be able to open a newspaper and see sections on Politics, Business, Sports, *Gossip*. We want to see people at their worst.

In our text tonight we'll see Noah at his worst. But first, let's remember who he was: A blameless man, a preacher of righteousness, a faithful follower of God Almighty. But, none of those descriptors mean that he was sinless. Tonight we read the report of a terrible incident in his life. Why does God record and broadcast this for us? Is this some sort of cosmic gossip? "Did you hear what *NOAH* did the other day?!?" Of course not. This text serves multiple purposes. First, it is a pit stop in God's unfolding work of redemption. After Adam and Eve sinned, God came to them and said, "I have a plan to make right what you have ruined." Genesis records for us the opening moves of the plan, to carve out and preserve a particular lineage from which the Messiah would ultimately come. He would come through a particular group of people and this is their story.

In addition, we know that the things written in the Old Testament are preserved for our instruction and encouragement - that we would be built up in our ability to follow God and endure with hope, *and* that we can learn to be careful, lest we ourselves fall into sin.¹ This story is strange and sordid and scandalous and sad. But it's also profitable for us and prophetic.

When we left off, God brought Noah and his sons out of the ark, blessed them, and established new directives for them as they went out to fill the world. Between verses 17 and 18, at least a couple of decades have passed. Noah's settled into a new career and has grown grandchildren.

Genesis 9:18 - ¹⁸Noah's sons who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan.

There is going to be a conspicuous focus on Canaan in these verses, even though he doesn't actually appear in the story. It leads to a lot of head scratching from commentators. In fact, this whole passage has elicited a whole lot of conjecture, speculation, and misapplications. And there will be some questions we have that we simply don't have a clear answer for.

But remember the first audience: The Children of Israel - a group who would be commanded by God to *destroy* completely whole nations of Canaanites. God's judgment on them was not unwarranted. He had an overwhelming case against them. And, as agents of judgment, the Children of Israel would not only be eye-witness to their evil, God would reveal to them the history of their immoral atrocities. God did not flip a coin and choose the Canaanites for destruction.

Genesis 9:19 - These three were Noah's sons, and from them the whole earth was populated.

¹ Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11-12

Back in 2009, the *Washington Post* reported this in their Science News section:

*"All of Earth's people, according to a new analysis...fall into just three genetic groups."*²

The Bible is not designed to be a science textbook, but that doesn't mean our faith is unscientific. We don't need to fear research or the academic study of our world, our history, and our biology. These things *verify* what God has already told us in His word.

Genesis 9:20-21 - ²⁰Noah, as a man of the soil, began by planting a vineyard. ²¹He drank some of the wine, became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.

John Gill points out that Noah became a "man of the soil." He did not set himself up as "lord of the earth." Very interesting. If anyone had the right to claim leadership or establish authority, it was Noah, the deliverer. The ark builder. The one who speaks with God. And yet, that's not what he did. He grabbed a hoe and a shovel and went to work cultivating a little plot of ground.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. In our social media obsessed culture, humility is a worthless virtue. But, in God's economy, it is a *necessity*. It is a fundamental requirement to faithfully live out the Christian life. Be a humble person.

Something went very wrong with Noah's farming. We see him developing this vineyard and then, when the time came, producing a vintage and getting what we can only describe as hammered drunk one day in his tent and stripping off all his clothes. This is weird. It's shameful.

A number of commentators try to excuse Noah and suggest that he had no idea wine could ferment and make a person drunk.³ Even if we try to give Noah the benefit of the doubt, this is a stretch. He wasn't a stupid man. He had lived hundreds of years, watching a wicked world in all their excess, in all their sinfulness, in all their depraved immorality, and he had preached to them about righteousness and judgment and how to honor God.

Drunkenness is *always* disapproved of in the Bible. You are *commanded* to not be drunk. Not on wine, not on whiskey, not on pills, not on anything.⁴ Rather, you and I are supposed to be *filled* with the Holy Spirit - making *Him* the refreshment we drink in to warm our hearts and bring us joy.

There's a devotional warning here: You and I are capable of *shocking* levels of sin. Remember who Noah was. Remember how he is described. Remember his incredible devotion to God. If *he* is able to fall into sin, so are you and I. And so, here at the start, this passage urges us to not let our spiritual guard down, but to **continue in uprightness**. Keep yourself upright in your walk.

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/06/21/AR2009062101726.html>

³ See *Ellicotts, Barnes, Benson*

⁴ Ephesians 5:18

Commenting on Noah's sin, John Bunyan wrote [Paraphrased due to use of Olde English]:

"Though the days of affliction, of temptation and distress, are harsh...yet they are not half so dangerous as are the days of peace and liberty.

Noah...it was better with you when you were [an ark builder]. Yea, it was better with you, when a world of ungodly men set themselves against you! Yea, when every day your life was in danger to be destroyed by the giants, against whom you were a preacher [for] a hundred years! For then you walked with God; Then you were better than all the world; but now you are in the relapse!"⁵

Genesis 9:22 - ²²Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.

Was Ham a believer? I find it impossible to say he *wasn't*. After all, God had just judged the whole world because of their unbelief. Would it be just for Him to allow *one* heathen to skate through the flood? When the chapter opened, Ham was *blessed* along with Noah and his brothers. And yet, we see here an appalling sin. Ham, at very least, was ogling his father, mocking him, and spreading the word of his humiliation. There's *enjoyment* both in the looking and the telling to Shem and Japheth. But was it more than that?

Now, this is going to get a little uncomfortable, but we're already in the midst of an embarrassing scandal and I think it's worth dealing with something that you will come across if you read commentaries on this passage. Based off of the teaching of some third century Jewish rabbis, a tradition grew that Ham maybe *sodomized* Noah or *castrated* him.⁶ Some accept the sexual assault idea because, in the Law of Moses, we read the phrase "uncover their nakedness" and it can be a euphemism for such an act. There are some problems, though. One is that this idea originates from the Babylonian Talmud, not the Bible. Second, scholars debate over whether the language justifies an interpretation of sexual assault.⁷ Also, we're not told that *Ham* uncovered Noah's nakedness (which in other parts of the Old Testament is a euphemism for sexual activity), *Noah* uncovered his own nakedness.

Is it possible that Ham raped or castrated Noah? Sadly, yes. But, let's take this on face value. At least some scholars feel that there was perversion in the way he was looking at his father.⁸ He didn't just accidentally walk in and walk out. Then he's *delighting* in telling his two brothers.⁹ This is another sober warning to us of what even a *redeemed* heart is capable of when we don't walk in the Spirit. Let's see the response.

Genesis 9:23 - ²³Then Shem and Japheth took a cloak and placed it over both their shoulders, and walking backward, they covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father naked.

⁵ John Bunyan *An Exposition Of The First Ten Chapters Of Genesis*

⁶ <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~dmg2/what%20did%20ham%20do.pdf>

⁷ See *James Montgomery Boice & NET Study Bible Notes*

⁸ See *Walke, Stedman*

⁹ Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

They were intent on *not* seeing their father naked. Nudity is so common place in our world, so emphasized, that we feel the need to *inflate* Ham's sin. "It *must've* been more than just seeing his old man naked and laughing about it." But look at how seriously Shem and Japheth took this task.

In the ancient world, being exposed this way was a big, big deal. Herodotus, the Greek historian from the 400's BC, wrote about how the king of Lydia compelled one of his bodyguards to look on the nakedness of the queen and, as a result, *one of them* had to be put to death.¹⁰

Shem and Japheth not only show great respect, but great compassion. Their father has made a fool of himself. And yet, they figure out a way to cover him up. I'm guessing the effort would've been funny if the situation weren't so tragic. They demonstrate for us one of the functions of Godly love. Of course, God was the first to show this kind of love. What did He do when Adam and Eve were found naked and ashamed? He clothed them, personally and carefully. In Ezekiel 16, God is pouring out His heart to wayward Israel and He describes the kind of love He has:

Ezekiel 16:8 - ⁸ " 'Then I passed by you and saw you, and you were indeed at the age for love. So I spread the edge of my garment over you and covered your nakedness. I pledged myself to you, entered into a covenant with you—this is the declaration of the Lord God—and you became mine.

God's love has been poured into our hearts and now we get to be like Him, allowing that love to cover a multitude of sins.¹¹ That doesn't mean we participate in coverups or ignore sin. It means we lovingly work to restore *repentant* believers back into the family of faith. We live in a time when some mistakes get you cancelled no matter how long ago they happened. In the church:

Galatians 6:1-2 - if someone is overtaken in any wrongdoing, you who are spiritual, restore such a person with a gentle spirit, watching out for yourselves so that you also won't be tempted. ² Carry one another's burdens; in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Noah teaches us the importance of **continuing in uprightness**. Shem and Japheth teach us to **cover over sin with love**. There's still one more thought for us as we see what came next.

Genesis 9:24-25 - ²⁴When Noah awoke from his drinking and learned what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said: Canaan is cursed. He will be the lowest of slaves to his brothers.

Why wasn't *Ham* the target of Noah's cursing? We have to endure some fog and vagaries in this story. I will say, thus far in Genesis, we can notice that, *at the time*, sins were not *immediately* judged. There was no Theocratic government like Israel would have under the Law. Adam and Eve sin and there were sudden relational and physical consequences, but God did not mete out what

¹⁰ Herodotus *The Histories* 1.8-13

¹¹ Romans 5:5, 1 Peter 4:8, Proverbs 10:12

was due them right then and there. The same is true of Cain. And Lamech. And the wicked generations leading to the flood. And the same is usually true of your sin and mine in our time.

There would be a painful rift in this family from here on out. That was a *consequence* of Noah's sin and Ham's sin. But then, God uses Noah to proclaim a prophecy concerning the descendants of one of Ham's sons, the nations we know as the Canaanites. We see a Spiritual principle proved through Ham and his descendants: You reap what you sow. Ham brought shame to his father because of his lascivious disrespect, leading to judgment. The Canaanites would do the same.

The prophecy continues:

Genesis 9:26-27 - ²⁶ He also said: Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem; Let Canaan be Shem's slave. ²⁷ Let God extend Japheth; let Japheth dwell in the tents of Shem; let Canaan be Shem's slave.

From Shem came the *Semitic* people, specifically the Jews. The prophecy of enslavement was fulfilled in the time of the conquest under Joshua and the kings of Israel.

Historically, there have been some who call themselves 'Christian' who attempted to use this prophecy to justify the enslavement of the African people.¹² This is a loathsome and satanic distortion of what the Bible says. It is a rejection of truth and the teachings of Scripture. There is no defense for the historic, worldwide phenomenon of human slavery.

What might we pull from these verses for ourselves? Well, this passage not only points us toward the conquest of the Promised Land, in a greater sense it continues the melody of salvation. That one day, despite all the sin and all our mistakes, and all our division, anyone would be able to **come into the tent** and find shelter there. Once God completed the plan, sent His Son to live, die, and rise again, human beings would be able to be united together, no matter their background or ethnicity, no matter their economic status, no matter what mistakes they had made, and be brought together in Christ, the Son of Shem. We're to live as brothers and sisters, not enslaving one another, but choosing to serve one another out of love and affection and family loyalty.

Genesis 9:28-29 - ²⁸ Now Noah lived 350 years after the flood. ²⁹ So Noah's life lasted 950 years; then he died.

Here's an interesting thought: Depending on how you do the math, Noah may have lived to see Abraham turn 58 years old. There's a debate, some scholars count differently and say he died 2 years prior. We can't be sure. It does seem like Shem *outlived* Abraham or very nearly did.¹³

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/01/arts/from-noah-s-curse-to-slavery-s-rationale.html>

¹³ See https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/112063/jewish/Abrahams-Early-Life.htm & <https://creation.com/meeting-the-ancestors>

So Noah's part in the plan of God comes to a close. It's a rough landing. But I'm so glad that this remarkable man isn't *defined* by his mistake. When you think of Noah, do you think first of this shortcoming or do you think of the amazing work God did through his life?

The same is true for you. You do not have to be defined by your mistakes. If you're a Christian, you are defined by God's loving work in and through your life. And even though we're all knuckleheads who stumble, God is still excited to use us when we're willing to obey Him and turn from our sin.

As we close, I'd invite us to take the warnings of this passage seriously. The things that were so scandalous about this story are commonplace in our society. Gossip. Drunkenness. Lewd activity. Sexual deviance. Nakedness on display. Family division. Are any of those things unheard of in our world today? They are *pillars* of our culture and entertainment. They're normal and prevalent. But look at the what terrible work they do.

These dangers lurk at our door. We are just as capable of sin as these heroes of the faith were and so we must decide to go God's way. We want to be people who **continue in uprightness**, because we're commanded to live that way.¹⁴ We're to "practice righteousness." And when someone in your sphere of influence falls into sin, be the one who helps to **cover over sin with love**. Finally, let's take joy in the fact that we get to **come together** in this wonderful tent of faith. Jesus, by His grace and power, has made us a family. Let's protect and cherish that spiritual unity and invite others to join in.

¹⁴ Matthew 5:6,