

PREFACE

We now begin in earnest the tracing of the Messiah's lineage—that is, the prophesied line from which the anointed one would emerge. Last week I mentioned in passing that one fascinating aspect of this study is that, unlike most studies in which we are more often than not *reminding* each other of things we already know, here we will very often be discovering from Scripture facts brand new to many of us. And my guess is that this passage will prove to be an excellent example of that.

GOD, JAPHETH AND SHEM

The context for this passage—in Genesis 9—is familiar to us: Put succinctly, Noah gets drunk and naked; one of his sons has some fun with that fact, but his two other sons show respect to their father and cover his nakedness. This sets up the curses and blessings in vv25-27 that are our focus—especially v27.

Read Genesis 9:24-27.

Sidebar: The story of vv21-24 has always seemed mysterious to me. If all Ham had done was make sport of his inebriated dad—crack some jokes about it to his brothers—the resulting curse seems an over-reaction. But if that was all that Ham had done—crack a few jokes—how could Noah, upon awakening (and probably hung over from his bender) immediately know “what his youngest son had done to him”?

Without getting into too many details, the probable answer lies buried behind the euphemistic “saw the nakedness” (v22)—especially combined with “uncovered” (v21). From Leviticus 18 we learn that the phrase was later used to describe incestuous sexual sin—and not coincidentally, this described the abominable sexual practices of the Canaanites, descendants of Ham (v25).

v25: The First Curse

Because of his behavior, Ham's descendants (“Canaan”) are cursed by Noah in v25. Ham's three other sons and their descendants settled in various parts of Africa, but Canaan's descendants settled in the area we know today as Israel—the Promised Land. In Noah's curse he prophesied that Canaan would be “a servant of servants [i.e., the lowest form of servanthood]...to his brothers.” Did this come true?

Learning of Joshua's victories in the area, the inhabitants of several cities in Canaan lied to Joshua, hiding the fact that they were not at all from a distant land, but near neighbors within Canaan. When he learned of the subterfuge, Joshua declared in v9:23,

“Now therefore, you are cursed, and you shall never cease being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.”

Later King Solomon did the same thing.

Read 1 Kings 9:20-21.

v26: First Blessing

In v26 Noah does not bless his son Shem directly, but blesses the one who would become his God: “the LORD”—i.e., *Yahweh*.

Read v26.

Here it is prophesied that *Yahweh* [the covenant name of God] would establish a personal covenant relationship with Shem and his descendants; they would be a special people to Him. Then follows a reiteration of the initial curse on Ham’s descendants: “And let Canaan be his servant.”

v27: Second Blessing

Now, as we reach the most important verse in this passage, we have also reached a fork in the road. It should not come as a surprise that once again we have divergent interpretations of a passage. Happily, the two are not mutually exclusive: both represent perfectly true conclusions; they only part company on which is being stated by the biblical text. Because of this, and because both interpretations are supported by respected scholars, I am duty-bound to mention both.

Read v27.

The controversy is simple stated: Who is “him” in the second line? Does “him” (or “he”) refer to Japheth, or to God? [not *Yahweh*, but *Elohim*]

The Japheth Interpretation

The preponderance of scholars favor the Japheth interpretation. Our common modern translations either favor this, or leave it ambiguous. The NIV states it explicitly by repeating the name:

May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.

The prophecy states in the first line that Japheth would be “enlarged”—i.e., to spread out, be spacious, open. So who were the descendants of Japheth? Turn the page to Genesis 10. Verses 2-4 give the records of the descendants of Japheth.

Read v5.

The word translated “nations” in the NASB is the Hebrew *goy*—i.e., Gentiles, as it is explicitly translated in the KJVs. So, as William Varner tells us,

[this describes] tribes which settled in areas that would later be called Eastern Europe and Russia. An anthropologist would refer to Japheth’s descendants as the Indo-European peoples.

The important (and argued) line of the prophecy is in line two: “And let him dwell in the tents of Shem.” So the first thing we need to establish is, Who is Shem? Who were his descendants? Perhaps some of you have already figured this out.

The descendants of Shem [pronounced *shame*] would of course be referred to as “Shemites.” In the Greek this becomes “Semites”—i.e., the Semitic peoples: principally, Jews and Arabs.

Verse 27 does not speak of Gentiles invading and possessing the land of the Semites, as Joshua's invasion of Canaan meant that Israel would dwell in houses they did not build. It means that Gentiles would be "folded into" the Semites—specifically, Gentiles would *share in the blessings of the Semites*. Before we pursue this further, let's look at the other interpretation of this verse.

The God Interpretation

This is the interpretation put forth by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., well-respected author of *The Messiah in the Old Testament*.

Instead of the "him" or "he" in v27 referring back to Japheth, his position—and the position of a few others; he is not alone, just in the minority—is that it refers back to "God" [*elohim*]. As Kaiser states it,

Therefore, the meaning of Genesis 9:27 is God's announcement that his advent will take place among the Shemites, later known through the Greek form of their name as the Semites.

God would "dwell" first of all as His *shekinah* glory, atop the mountain, and over and in the tabernacle.

Read Exodus 40:34-35.

dwell = *shakan* = a primitive root [apparently akin (by transmission) to <H7901> (shakab) through the idea of **lodging**; compare <H5531> (cikluwth), <H7925> (shakam)]; **to reside or permanently stay** (literal or figurative) :- abide, continue, (cause to, make to) dwell (-er), have habitation, inhabit, lay, place, (cause to) remain, rest, set (up).

Here was the first visual fulfillment of the Genesis prophecy. But it is also a *Messianic* prophecy; this interpretation affirms that God would literally come from the line of Shem. Did God incarnate—Jesus of Nazareth—descend from Shem? The genealogy in Luke 3 tells us He did. It traces Jesus' lineage back through David, and back further to Shem, the son of Noah. Jesus the Messiah—God in flesh—was a Semite, as foretold by God Himself in Genesis 9:27. But He was also "*God...dwell[ing] in the tents of Shem.*"

Understand what we have so far:

- In our previous study (Genesis 3:15), we established that the Messiah would be the seed of the first woman. He would be human flesh.
- In this study (Genesis 9:27), we have established the the Messiah would be very God, coming from and dwelling with the Semites.

Now let's return to the "Japheth" interpretation.

THE HOUSE OF SHEM

The Japheth interpretation of v27 is that the object of the second line is not God, but Japheth, and that the prophecy refers to the descendants of Japheth—the Indo-Europeans, or Gentiles—sharing in the blessings accorded the descendants of Shem.

Turn to the gospel of John.

John 10:16

In Chapter Nine of John's gospel, Jesus has healed a man born blind. The man is taken to the Pharisees and he witnesses to them about what Jesus did for him. At their persistent cross-examination of him for details, he answers, in v27,

"I told you already and you did not listen; why do you want to hear it again? You do not want to become His disciples too, do you?" (John 9:27)

Well, this *really* ticks them off, and they arrogantly declare,

"...we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where He is from." (John 9:28b-29)

(Uh, guys, Moses wrote Genesis 3:15, and he wrote Genesis 9:27.)

Jesus heard about this exchange and meets up with the man whose sight he had restored, and in their conversation Jesus affirms that He is indeed the "Son of Man"—i.e., the prophesied Messiah.

Read John 9:35-38.

Then in the next chapter is the Lord's beautiful discourse on His coming as the "Good Shepherd." In v7 He declares that He is willing to give His life for His sheep. In v14 He describes the intimate relationship He enjoys with the sheep that dwell within His "fold," and now He expresses not just His willingness, but the *fact* that He will indeed give His life for those in His flock.

Read vv14-15.

Then, in v16, He slips in an "Oh, by the way" bombshell sufficient to destroy the smug complacency of those Pharisees.

Read v16.

Here is the Messiah Himself declaring that Japheth will dwell in the tents of Shem; Gentiles will surely be in one flock with Israel, sharing the blessings of salvation through the shed blood of the Lamb—who is also the Good Shepherd.

Now please turn to the book of Acts to see how this all played out. We're going to just touch lightly on three scenes of individuals from both in and outside Israel—outside the descendants of Shem—being brought into the one fold of the Christ.

Acts 8:36-38

Noah's son Ham's descendants settled in Canaan and Africa. In Acts 8:26, an angel tells Philip to go to a desert road, where he has an encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the queen of the Ethiopians. The man is sitting there reading Scripture! Philip witnesses to the man, and we have the result in vv36-38.

Read Acts 8:36-38.

Sidebar: Verse 37 is disputed [not in best manuscripts], but vv36-38 reveal clearly that Philip accepted the eunuch's profession of faith and baptized him.

So here was a descendant of Ham—by God's grace, even a descendant of the cursed Ham—being brought into the flock.

Acts 9:17-19

In the next chapter we have the dramatic conversion of the descendant of Shem, Saul of Tarsus, to Christ. The story is familiar: the Lord sends Ananias to both confront Saul and baptize him.

Read Acts 9:17-19.

Acts 10:

Finally, in Acts 10, we have the account of the literal fulfillment of the Genesis 9 prophecy.

Read Acts 10:1-2.

Here is a descendant of Japheth, an Italian, and it is through Peter's encounter with this soldier that the Lord teaches the apostle that even the sons of Japheth can become disciples of Christ.

Read Acts 10:44-48.

CONCLUSION

Noah's prophecy of Genesis 9:27 tells us,
"May God enlarge Japheth, And let him dwell in the tents of Shem"

The two interpretations of this verse reveal that

1. the Messiah, who will be very God, will come from the house of Shem— from Israel;
2. that the house of Japheth—Gentiles—will be welcomed into the blessings of Israel—that is, the blessings of God through His Son, the Christ.

Both interpretations are true; the prophecy, by *either* interpretation, has been fulfilled. And when when you put them together, what do you have?

Read Matthew 1:22-23.

Genesis 9:20-27

20 Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.
 21 He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.
 22 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 and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.
 24 When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.
 25 So he said,
 "Cursed be Canaan;
 A servant of servants
 He shall be to his brothers."
 26 He also said,
 "Blessed be the Lord,
 The God of Shem;
 And let Canaan be his servant.
 27 May God enlarge Japheth,
 And let him **dwell in the tents of Shem;**
 And let Canaan be his servant."

*a triple
 curse and
 double
 blessing*

The Noahic Prediction

"God" Interpretation

Exodus 40:34-35

34 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and **the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle**. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and **the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle**.

John 1:14

And the Word became flesh, and **dwelt [tabernacled, tented] among us**, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Luke 3:36

...the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, **the son of Shem**, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech,

Revelation 21:2-3

2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.
 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, **the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell [tabernacle, tent] among them**, and they shall be His people, and **God Himself will be among them**,"

"Japheth" Interpretation

John 10:16

"**I have other sheep, which are not of this fold**; I must bring them also, and they will hear My voice; and they will become one flock with one shepherd."

Acts 10:1-2, 45-48

Now there was a man at Caesarea named Cornelius, a centurion **of what was called the Italian cohort**, a devout man and one who feared God with all his household... All the circumcised believers who came with Peter were amazed, because **the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out on the Gentiles** also. For they were hearing them speaking with tongues and exalting God... Then Peter... ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to stay on for a few days.