

SESSION 58: BAD BEHAVIOR, PART TWO

Genesis 9:18-29

February 2, 2025

PREFACE

Read Genesis 9:20-29.

In our previous session we looked at the unfortunate behavior of Noah, the disrespectful (at the least) behavior of Noah's middle son, Ham, and the *respectful* behavior of Noah's oldest and youngest sons, Shem and Japheth. We cannot say with any certainty just *what* Ham did to his father, only that what follows in the text—vv24-27—makes clear it was bad—perhaps even atrocious.

v24

One last note on this verse that has Noah wakening.

Then Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him.


I can't shake the impression that if Noah's realization—or, probably more accurate, what he was told—was that Ham had made some inappropriate remarks about his father, wouldn't the text reflect that with something like "what his youngest son had *said* about him"? Instead the text has, "what his youngest son had *done* to him." Even if both possibilities would have been considered offensive in that time and place, that choice of words with a more active verb—had done to (*asah amar*)—sounds more egregious.

On the other hand, *asah* (done to) is a very broad, flexible root that can be translated a number of ways, and, more telling, *amar* (to/unto him), while flexible as well, invariably has reference to some form of *speaking*, which would seem to point us back to something Ham *said*, rather than *did*.

So, again, we can only conclude that we don't know what transpired, except that whatever Ham did, it was wrong. The rest of this episode makes that abundantly clear.

In vv25-27 Noah prophesies regarding the future of his sons and grandsons. 📖

Please note this important distinction: Noah does not *himself* curse Canaan; he prophesies that Canaan *will* be accursed. Note as well that while his other two prophesies are for his sons Shem and Japheth, the first prophecy is not for Ham, but Ham's fourth son, Canaan.

**So he said, “Cursed be Canaan;
A servant of servants
He shall be to his brothers.”** 

And immediately we wonder, *Why is Noah “cursing” the son of Ham instead of the immediate offender, Ham himself?*

First, as stated, he is not “cursing” anyone; Noah is prophesying that Canaan and his line will be an accursed line—a prophecy future history will show was unequivocally fulfilled.

Second, the prophecy does not apply to Ham’s other sons: Cush, Mizraim (or Egypt), and Put (10:6)—just the one, Canaan, his youngest. Thus, if Noah’s prophecy were to be assigned to Ham, it would apply to *all* of his descendants, instead of just Canaan.

Who Were the Canaanites?

In Chapter Ten we will take a deeper dive into the descendants—the “seed”—flowing out from Noah’s three sons. But to understand Noah’s prophecy in vv25-27 we must at least look at a thumbnail sketch of the Canaanites.

The Canaanites settled northern Africa (today’s Libya, Egypt, Cush, Havilah, etc.), the Sinai Peninsula, portions of the SW corner of Arabia, and the land on both sides of the Jordan, up to where the land angles west into today’s Turkey. Put succinctly, it is Canaan’s descendants—Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, etc.—which Israel will displace or conquer when they come into the Promised Land. This line will include the Moabites, and those in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. As a group they will be known for their idol worship and depravity.

In Chapter Eighteen of Leviticus Yahweh itemizes His statutes regarding moral purity, and especially nakedness. He specifically contrasts the moral purity of His laws with the behavior of the people of Canaan.

Read Leviticus 18:1-4.

The Canaanite people were notable for their perverse cultic practices, and Yahweh warned the Israelites not to adopt them.

Read Leviticus 18:21.

I have no explanation for why the LSB and NASB here translate the Hebrew *ebed* as “servant” instead of “slave,” which those versions typically prefer.

And, of course, archaeological evidence has revealed that during certain periods Israel did indeed sacrifice its children to the Canaanite god, Molech—even during the reign of Solomon.

For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. And Solomon did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and did not follow Yahweh fully, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable idol of Moab, on the mountain which is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the detestable idol of the sons of Ammon. (1 Kings 11:5–7)

H. C. Leupold: In Abraham's day the measure of their iniquity was already almost full. By the time of the entrance of Israel into Canaan under Joshua the Canaanites, collectively also called Amorites, were ripe for divine judgment through Israel... The Phoenicians and the colony of Carthage surprised the Romans by the depth of their depravity. Verily cursed was Canaan!

When Noah states that Canaan will be “a servant of servants,” or “slave of slaves” it means that his people will become, as in the NIVs, “the lowest of slaves.” There is nothing lower than the slave of a slave. And the prophecy of v25 goes on to state that Canaan shall be this even “to his brothers.”

Less than a century later, King Solomon forced the remaining Amorites into slavery: “All the people who were left of the Amorites . . . who were not of the people of Israel—their descendants who were left after them in the land, whom the people of Israel were unable to devote to destruction—these Solomon drafted to be slaves” (1 Kings 9:20-21). The Amorites are last mentioned in Amos 2:10. It is assumed they either died out or were absorbed into the culture of Israel. (GotQuestions.org)

This is one example of how some of the descendants of Canaan, Ham's son, would become slaves/servants of their “brother” Shem's descendants.

v26

In contrast to that for Canaan, Noah's prophecy then bestows *blessings* on Shem and Japheth.

**And he said,
“Blessed be Yahweh,
The God of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant.”**

In truth the literal blessing here is for “Yahweh, the God of Shem.” But those who know God’s word recognize as well that Shem will be blessed *because of* Yahweh. Out of Shem will come Abraham (11:10-26) and Isaac and Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel. It will be Israel that receives the blessing of the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the Law; to Israel will be bequeathed the land promised by Yahweh.

And let Canaan be his servant.

And there is a fascinating fulfillment to the last line of this verse.

Read 2 Samuel 21:1-2.

The Gibeonites were descended from the Amorites, who were, in turn, descended from Canaan, son of Ham. Joshua 9 tells the story of the craftiness of the Gibeonites who, while all those around them are being defeated by the incoming Israelites (such as at Jericho and Ai), they decide to fool the Jews rather than fight them. The Gibeonites present themselves to Joshua as poor vagabonds from a far away land and cut a covenant with Israel. When their deception is found out, because of the covenant Joshua cannot destroy the Gibeonites; instead they make them slaves to serve Israel.

“So now, you are cursed, and you shall never be cut loose from being slaves, both hewers of wood and drawers of water for the house of my God.” (Joshua 9:23)

So here, once again, we have the descendants of Canaan cursed, and serving the descendants of Shem.

v27

Verse 27 is the best of all, for it speaks of us Gentiles.

**“May God enlarge Japheth,
And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;
And let Canaan be his servant.”**

May God enlarge Japheth,

This prophecy, too, has been resoundingly fulfilled, for out of the three sons of Noah, it is Japheth’s line that had the furthest reach, extending NW into Europe, N into Turkey (Ottoman Empire), the Balkans, and E into today’s Iran and Iraq (Mesopotamia), Russia and beyond. But it is the second line that is most interesting.

And let him dwell in the tents of Shem;

The apostle Paul, employing the same imagery Christ did of branches connected to the vine (John 15), describes how the disobedience of Israel paved the way for Gentiles to be grafted into God's vine.

Read Romans 11:16-21. ➡

As we learned in the study of the Last Things, Christians are not, as some believe, a “new” Israel; Israel is Israel and remains God's chosen people, and Christians are followers of Christ Jesus, recognizing Him as the prophesied Messiah, while Israel—officially, at least—still waits for the Messiah, rejecting Jesus as the fulfillment of that promise.

The book of The Revelation makes clear that Israel remains special to God, and there will be a remnant that comes to faith in Jesus as the true Messiah during the Eschaton. They will be grafted back into the vine from which they had previously been severed, as Paul states further down in Romans 11.

**And they also, if they do not continue in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.
(Romans 11:23)**

Whether Jew or Gentile, there is only one “vine,” and it stands as a pretty good metaphor for “the tents of Shem.” Salvation has come to earth through Israel; as Jesus Himself stated it to the Samaritan woman in John 4, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews” (John 4:22). As D. A. Carson expresses it, “Just as the Jews stand within the stream of God's saving revelation, so also can it be said that they are the vehicle of that revelation, the historical matrix out of which that revelation emerges.”

Humanly speaking, Jesus was a Jew; He is descended directly from the Shem line out of Noah. For Japheth to “dwell in the tents of Shem” is another way of saying the Gentiles (or Greeks) from the Japheth line shall be the branches grafted into the salvation vine of Christ Jesus (John 15:6).

Admittedly the metaphors get mixed between John 15 and Romans 11—vine to olive tree—but the principle and application are the same.

In biblical and Semitic imagery and custom, to “dwell in someone’s tent” is to become part of the family, to not just share in the hospitality of the family, but to have a share in its blessings.

vv28-29

And Noah lived 350 years after the flood. So all the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

In keeping with the lifespans of the early patriarchs, Noah lived a good long life—twenty years longer than Adam, and well into the life of Abraham.

CONCLUSION

If we summarize this passage, on the one hand we have gained little insight into the events:

- Why did Noah get drunk? Who can say.
- Why was he naked? Not a clue.
- What did Ham do to his father? Don’t know.
- Was Canaan already demonstrating character traits that would point to the prophecy of his curse? Can’t say.

On the other hand, we have seen how and why the descendants of these three sons of Noah will be interwoven for millennia, with eternal consequences—all because of the simple events of this one day in Noah’s tent: an old man gets drunk, and one of his sons shows disrespect to him as a result.

There is one more thing we do not know after all this: Were the prophecies of vv25-27—the curse and the blessings—the *result* of these men’s actions, or were these men just demonstrating behavior God had already ingrained into their future?

Can’t say.

SESSION 58

Bad Behavior, part two
Genesis 9:18-29

v25

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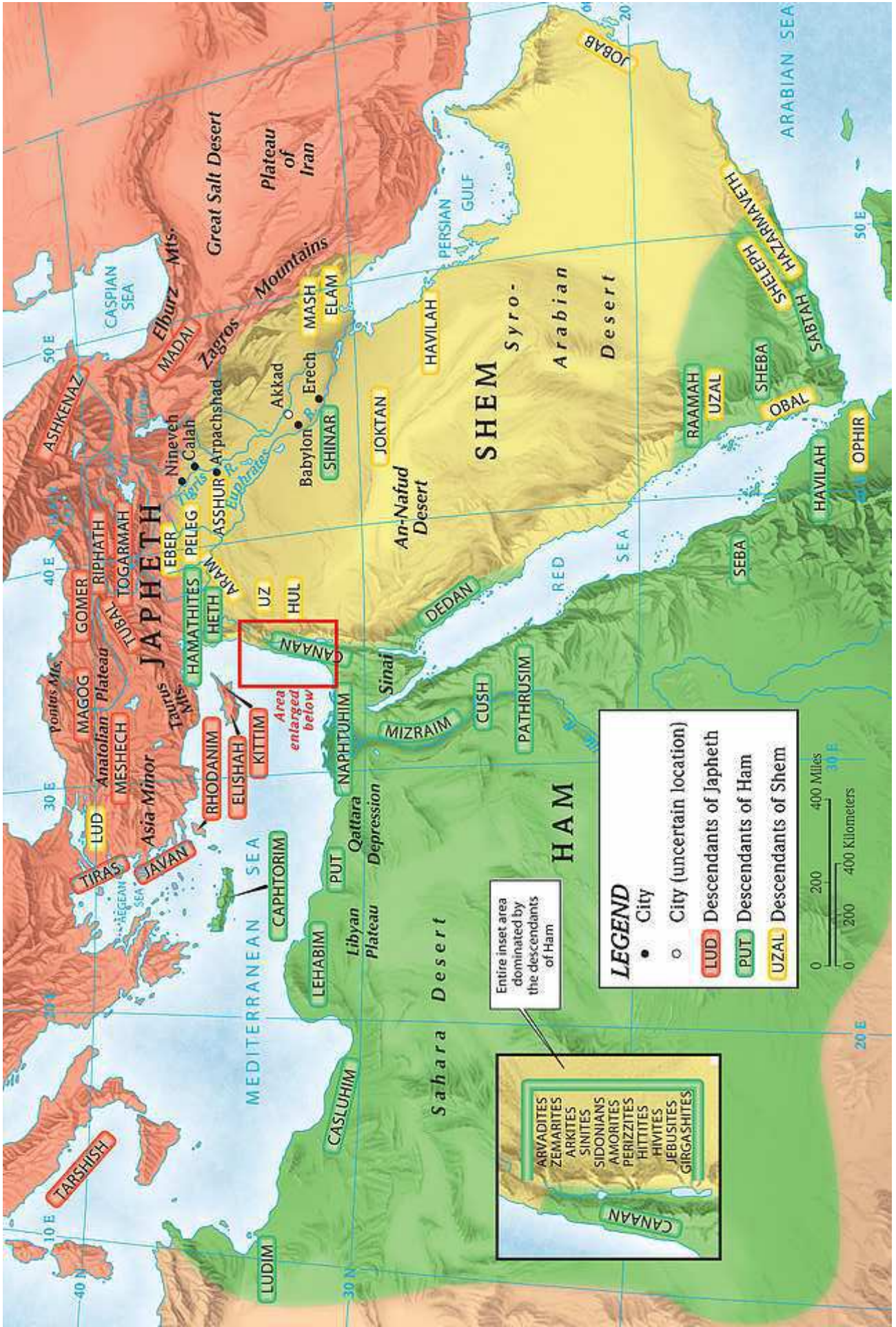
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Entire inset area dominated by the descendants of Ham

- CANAAN**
- ARVADITES
 - ZEMARITES
 - ARKITES
 - SINITES
 - SIDONIANS
 - AMORITES
 - PERIZZITES
 - HITTITES
 - HIVITES
 - JEBUSITES
 - GIRGASHITES

LEGEND

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- LUD Descendants of Japheth
- PUT Descendants of Ham
- UZAL Descendants of Shem

