

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XLI : GENESIS 9: 18–23 – NOAH’S INTOXICATION AND HAM’S SIN

*“The world seems all set for a new start. The slate has been wiped clean, and we hope that the mistakes of the antediluvians will not be repeated. But no sooner is the blessing pronounced and the eternal covenant confirmed than man lapses again. The righteous and blameless Noah, who had walked with God for six hundred and one years, falls victim to demon drink and disgraces himself in his tent. Worse still, his youngest son, instead of covering up his father physically and metaphorically, shows total lack of filial piety, prattling about the situation to his brothers. **In this last tragicomic scene, the truth that the ‘ideas of man’s mind are evil from his youth’ is starkly exhibited for all to see. Even the most righteous and their offspring may fall from grace in an unguarded moment. And such falls do have long-term consequences, as the curse on Ham’s descendants the Canaanites makes clear. Lack of filial piety and sexual indiscretion lead to bondage. But more important still, this last scene reminds us that were it not for the changed logic of God, in that he now cites man’s depravity as a ground for his mercy rather than for his judgment, the descendants of Noah would be heading for extinction in another deluge. However, even sinful man is now sustained by grace and can face the future not with complacency but with security. The world will indeed be filled and subdued by man.**” [Wenham, 1:206]*

Episode 3, Scene 9: Genesis 9:18, 19; **Theme:** *The sons of Noah: Shem, Ham, and Japheth, through whom all the earth was populated.*

¹⁸ And the sons of Noah, the ones coming forth from the ark, were Shem and Ham and Japheth. (Now Ham was the father of Canaan). ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and from these was all the earth populated.

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

v. 18 – The sons of Noah / who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. / Ham was the father of Canaan.

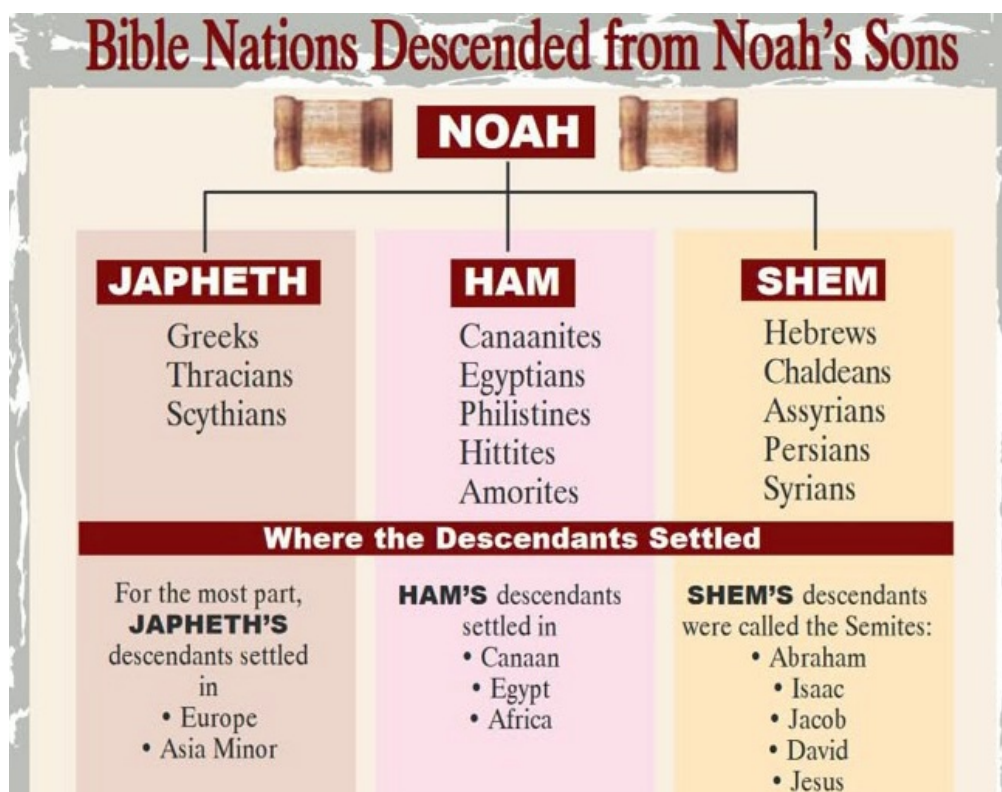
v. 19 – These three were the sons of Noah; / and from these the whole earth was peopled.

v. 18 – And the sons of Noah, — “This verse and the next come to underline the contrast between the small number of Noah’s sons who left the ark – that is, who remained on the earth after the Flood – and the great multitude of the earth’s inhabitants subsequently, and to tell us that nevertheless this vast population came into being only through the descendants of these three men.” [Cassuto, 2:148]

the ones coming forth from the ark, were Shem and Ham and Japheth. (Now Ham was the father of Canaan).* —** Noah’s sons have already been named in 5:32; 6:10; 7:13 but are here reintroduced by way of background information to clarify the subsequent story. Ham’s son, Canaan, is singled out for special mention not only because he will figure in the later curse and blessing (9:25-27) but because he is the progenitor of the Canaanites, the wicked inhabitants of the land promised to Abraham at the time Moses was editing this narrative and leading his people there. ***“Of the sons, only Ham’s filial successor is given in the passage (vv. 18, 22). He is the ‘father of Canaan’ who becomes the object of the patriarch’s curse (v. 25) and is of special

interest to the compiler of the Table of Nations (10:6, 15). The importance of this connection for the patriarchal stories and Moses' Israel cannot be overstated. The expression 'land of Canaan' dominates the patriarchal accounts (35x), beginning with Terah's sojourn (11:31) and concluding with the anticipated burial of Joseph (50:5, 13). For later Israel the Table of Nations oriented the Hebrews to their neighbors geographically and, inferentially, forewarns them of those peoples whose moral history and inclinations are suspect, especially the people of Canaan, where they will reside (e.g., Exod 6:4). Canaan was first and foremost associated in the Hebrew mind with a corrupt ancestry." [Mathews, 1:413; see also Wenham, 1:198; Cassuto, 2:148; Morris, 232]

v. 19 – These three were the sons of Noah, and from these was all the earth populated. — 'was populated,' Hebrew, *nāph^etsāh*, from the root *nāphats*, 'to disperse, to scatter,' is used 4x in the OT (Gen 9:19; 1 Sam 13:11; Isa 11:12; 33:3). This is associated with another word, *pûts*, which also means 'to scatter' and is used 62x, frequently in Gen 10-11 (e.g., 10:18; 11:4, 8, 9). So this remark anticipates the dispersal of mankind throughout the world as related in Gen 10-11. The obvious contrast with the small number who emerged from the ark shows that the command to 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth' (9:1, 7) was indeed carried out by Noah's descendants. [Wenham, 1:198; Waltke, 147]



THE STORY OF NOAH'S INTOXICATION (9:20–29)

First Paragraph — The Incident:

²⁰ And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. ²¹ Then he drank of the wine and was drunk, and became uncovered in his tent. ²² And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and went backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness.' (Gen 9:20-23 NKJV)

Rabbi Cassuto's translation:

v. 20 – Noah, the master of the earth, was the first / to plant a vineyard.

v. 21 – And he drank of the wine, and became drunk, / and lay uncovered in his tent.

**v. 22 – And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw / his father's nakedness,
and told his two brothers / outside.**

**v. 23 – Then Shem and Japheth took / a garment,
laid it / upon both their shoulders,
and walked backward / and covered their father's nakedness;
their faces were turned away, / and they did not see their father's nakedness.**

v. 20 – (Cassuto) Noah, the master of the earth, was the first to plant a vineyard. – (NKJV) And Noah began to be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard. — The literal Hebrew is 'Began Noah man [*ʾîsh*] of the soil (earth) [*hā'ădāmāh*],' so the question arises as to what does 'began' modify? Our English versions are pretty well split with many having 'began' modify Noah as a farmer, 'Noah began to be a farmer [*or, husbandman*]' (KJV, ASV, Darby, Geneva, NKJV), or 'Noah began to be a man of the soil' (ESV, Evangelical Heritage Version, Legacy Standard Bible, New RSV, *et. al.*). Other translations have 'began' modify planting, 'Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard' (HCSB, NET, NIV, New American Bible Rev Ed, New Catholic Bible, NRSVA, *et. al.*). Note Rabbi Cassuto translates the verse 'Noah, the master of the earth, was the first to plant a vineyard.' Gordon Wenham is similar, 'Noah, the man of the land, was the first to plant a vineyard.'

began — Hebrew, *chālal*. This word has a wide range of meanings according to the lexicons, from 'to profane' to 'to begin' (allowing some Jewish commentators to give the possible rendering of 'Noah debased himself;' Rabbi Nossan Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, 43). Most understand the word as being used here to mean either 'first' or 'to begin' (see the translations given above). Several of the commentators (e.g., Wenham, Waltke, Hamilton, Kidner) states the word 'began' implies a 'new, not a renewed, activity; the first occurrence of something, doing something for the first time.' How this fits in the narrative is debated.

WAS THIS A FULFILMENT OF LAMECH'S PROPHECY? — Gordon Wenham says this was a step forward in agriculture; whereas Noah's ancestors raised only the most basic foodstuffs, Noah introduces the cultivation of luxury items so that he can produce 'wine that maketh glad the heart of man' (Ps 104:15). [Wenham, 1:198] Bruce Waltke suggests Noah developed viticulture (*the science of growing grapes*) and viniculture (*the science of making wine*). [Waltke, 148] It is interesting that historically the vine / wine may be traced back to Armenia where the biblical ark landed. Several relate wine-making back to Lamech's prophecy concerning his son Noah:

'And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed."' (Gen 5:29)

Cassuto believes 9:20 as a fulfilment 'for otherwise why did Scripture make a point of quoting Lamech's words?' [Cassuto, 2:158] But others disagree this fulfills Lamech's prophecy: "Many commentators have interpreted Noah's vineyard as fulfillment of the 'comfort' for which Lamech longed (5:29). Noah's wine provided a pleasant relief for man (e.g., Ps 104:15) from the toilsome work of the crop. But the request of Lamech cries out for relief from the pain of the 'cursed' ground, and that is not alleviated by flood or vineyard." [Mathews, 1:416]

the master of the earth — This is Rabbi Cassuto's translation which he justifies as follows: "After the Deluge Noah became lord over the whole earth, for his family was the only one left of all the families of the earth, and he, as head of this family, was the head of the entire earth." [Cassuto, 2:159f] "Noah is described as a '*man of the soil*' in verse 20. The epithet is probably designed to say more than that he was a farmer. In view of his being the patriarch of the survivors of the flood, Noah would be considered as the master of the earth, or as Rashi understood it, the Lord of the earth (Ben Isaiah and Sharfman, 'The Pentateuch and Rashi's Commentary, p84). This view harmonizes with the identification of Noah as the second Adam." [Ross, 212f]

YET ANOTHER POLEMIC AGAINST THE PAGANS? — *"If we are to see in this introductory episode also a secondary purpose, we may surmise that the intention is to oppose the mythological concepts that attribute the origin of winemaking to some god or demi-god: the Bible informs us that this, too, was only a human invention."* [Cassuto, 2:160] "Along with the primary intent of the narrative to set the stage for the oracle, the point here forms a polemic against pagan ideas and practices. *The ancient Near East saw Armenia as the original home of wine, but Egyptian literature attributed its invention to the god Osiris, and Greek literature attributed it to Dionysius. The Genesis account, by contrast, reports that the beginning of wine and its effect on humans was anything but divine.*" [Ross, 213]

v. 21 – And he drank of the wine, and became drunk, — This is the first time the word 'wine' is used in the Scriptures. "The whole incident is related with extreme brevity – with the fewest words possible – since it is only a prelude to the main topic. Moreover, the nature of the story precludes a detailed description." [Cassuto, 2:161]

WAS NOAH CULPABLE FOR HIS SIN? — All the commentators admit the Hebrew construction is difficult and the proper translation is disputed (see above), so we cannot determine from the syntax alone whether Noah was the first viticulturalist or merely began his vocation anew following the flood. If Noah was the discoverer of viticulture, was he thus unaware of wine's effects (so Keil, 1:155; Lange, 1:336)? Was there a change in the environment after the *Mabbûl* and possibly fermentation was unknown to the antediluvian world? ("*Some writers have suggested that the different atmospheric conditions before the Flood somehow inhibited the decay process, but there seems to be no reasonable scientific basis for this idea.*" – Morris, 234) If so, can we absolve Noah of his behavior? Or was Noah's actions intentional and merely a representation of fallen humanity, even amongst the most faithful?

"These were new relationships, new assurances, and a new order to things in the world; but there remained the same old human heart." [Mathews, 1:415]

"Scripture does not hesitate to call attention to the failures of even the most saintly of men." [Morris, 233]

"The point, although subtle, is that the hero of the flood, a shining example of faith to future generations, gets drunk and lies exposing himself in his tent. The purpose of the description is obvious: humanity is much the same after the flood as it was before it." [Currid, 1:227]

"The Torah records a shameful event through which Noah was humiliated and which resulted in the blessings and curse that influence the trend of history to this very day. It demonstrates that even the greatest people can become degraded if they lose control of themselves, and it shows, through the different reactions of his sons and grandson, that

crisis brings out the true character of people. Thus, it is a powerful lesson in history and morality.” [Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, 43]

While there are too many unknowns for any to be dogmatic, this much is certain: ***Genesis does not stop to moralize on Noah’s behavior; it is neither condemned nor approved. “Here however the drunkenness is incidental: the point of the story is the marring of Ham’s inheritance through his flagrantly unfilial act.”*** [Kidner, 103]

and lay uncovered in his tent. — during the sleep that overcame him as a result of his drunkenness; compare below (v. 24): ‘*When Noah awoke.*’ As often when Scripture disapproves of certain actions, this verse does not go into elaborate and lurid detail. Note Noah exposed himself in private, not in public; this makes Ham’s invasion of his privacy more contemptible and his guilt more culpable. ***“Noah, apparently, cultivated a vineyard and whether intentionally or accidentally ended up with an intoxicating drink. Like many others in this condition, he had removed his clothes because of the sensation of overheating which results from the dilation of the veins at the surface of the skin. Drunkenness and nakedness have been closely associated throughout history.”*** [Arthur Custance, *Doorway Papers*, vol 1: *Noah’s Three Sons; Part 3: Why Noah Cursed Canaan Instead of Ham: A New Approach to an Old Problem* (Doorway Publications, Ancaster, Ontario Canada) second edition 2013, second printing 2021; p109] ***“The verb occurs in the same Hebrew stem once more and is clearly reflexive (Prov 18:2), thus ‘uncovered himself’ (NJPS) is meant. The GNB has the explicit ‘took off his clothes.’*** There is no indication here that Ham disrobed his father. Noah was so inebriated that he stripped himself and probably passed out in the tent unclothed.” [Mathews, 1:417]

v. 22, 23 – And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered their father’s nakedness; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. — Several unsolved controversies surround these next few verses, in part because of their brevity. Questions as old as the Talmudic sages and medieval commentators, up to and including modern exegetes, remain. *What was Ham’s sin (v. 22)? Since it was Ham who sinned, why was Ham’s son Canaan cursed (vv. 25-27)?* Let us look at these controversies and attempt to come to some conclusions, as best as we are able.

And Ham, the father of Canaan — Although it was just mentioned in v. 18, our passage pauses to identify Ham again as ‘*the father of Canaan*’ in anticipation of the curse against Canaan (v. 25). It is mentioned here at the moment of the deed because it is in this act that the similarity between Ham and the children of Canaan became manifest.

‘HAM, FATHER OF’ A GLOSS? — Since Noah later curses Canaan instead of Ham, some have suggested ‘*Ham, father of*’ was a gloss and v. 22 originally read, ‘*Canaan saw his father’s nakedness...*’. While this would explain why Noah curses Canaan in vv. 25-27, it would introduce other problems. Aside from the lack of any textual support for this theory, throughout the *Mabbûl* narrative the sons of Noah are identified as ‘*Shem, Ham and Japheth*’; why would this passage alone identify them as ‘*Shem, Canaan and Japheth?*’ [Wenham, 1:197]

HAM WAS NOT A LITTLE BOY — As we consider the events which follow, it must be remembered Ham was not a little boy that wandered into his father’s bedroom; he was over a hundred years old by this time. Henry Morris points out this was long enough after the *Mabbûl* that Canaan too was sufficiently mature enough for his bent of character to have been well known to his grandfather Noah. [NET Study Bible, 24; Morris, 234]

saw his father's nakedness — ‘saw,’ Hebrew, *rā’āh*, according to StepBible.org means ‘to see, look at, inspect, perceive, consider.’ Bruce Waltke says it here means ‘to look at (searchingly)’ (Song 1:6; 6:11b), not a harmless or accidental seeing. ‘**Nakedness**’ Hebrew, ‘*er’vāh*, meaning ‘nakedness, nudity, shame, genitalia’ (implying shameful exposure). “It is hard for modern people to appreciate why seeing another’s nakedness was such an abomination, because nakedness is so prevalent today. In the ancient world, especially in a patriarchal society, seeing another’s nakedness was a major offense. (See the account in Herodotus, *Histories* 1.8-13, where a general saw the nakedness of his master’s wife, and one of the two had to be put to death.)” [NET Study Bible, 24]

HABAKKUK’S COMMENTARY ON SIMILAR SITUATIONS —

“Habakkuk thunders, ‘*Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies*’ (Hab. 2:15). Habakkuk

connects exposing one’s nakedness through intoxication with ‘**prurient voyeurism**,’ an act that deprives another of his or her dignity and desire for propriety (cf. Lam. 4:14). Nakedness is associated with shame (Gen. 3:7, 21), is publicly demeaning (2 Sam. 6:16, 20), and is incompatible with living in God’s presence (Ex. 20:26; cf. Deut. 23:12-14). When human beings fell into sin, they became aware through their nakedness of the potential for doing good and evil. The regulations against nakedness aim to protect people from sin.” [Waltke, 148f]

prurient voyeurism refers to the act of secretly watching others, especially in private moments, for sexual gratification, combining the idea of ‘prurient’ (having lustful or sexual interest) with ‘voyeurism’ (peeping or spying),

DID HAM PHYSICALLY DO SOMETHING TO NOAH? — Some when taking ‘saw his father’s nakedness’ along with v. 24, ‘when Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him’ believes there is more to this narrative than first meets the eye. As mentioned in the introduction to these verses, questions on Ham’s sin goes back to the earliest known literature and continues to this day. What are some of the theories?

- **Ham sexually abused Noah** – One of the most prevalent theories is that Ham did more than ‘look’ but rather committed a homosexual act (sodomy?). Similar language for ‘look upon’ found in the Pentateuch to describe sexual transgressions is used in support of this theory.

- **Ham (or Canaan) castrated Noah** – Especially popular amongst Jewish interpreters (although it may be found among some Christian commentators) is that Ham castrated his father Noah. *Theophilus of Antioch*, 2nd century AD, while not the source of the view, is the earliest known reference for the castration interpretation. It is found in *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* and assumed in *Genesis Rabbah* 36.7; and homosexuality and castration are found debated in *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 70a. [Mathews, 1:418] At least one Jewish commentator attributes this to Canaan, not Ham: “According to *Pirkei d’Rabbi Eliezer*, Canaan castrated Noah” [Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, 44] Rabbi Cassuto also discusses pagan myths which may have had their origin from this narrative. “From the writings of Philo Byblius we learn that there was current among the Canaanites a legend regarding one of their gods – El-Kronos – who approached his father and with the knife in his hand perpetrated an act that prevented him from begetting anymore children. Similar legends are found in great number in the mythology of oriental peoples and the Greeks, and there is no need to cite many examples.... Although it is possible that the recollection of an ancient tale about an extremely vile deed survived among the Israelites

throughout the generations, and that it is reflected in rabbinic legends, yet this is not the meaning of the Pentateuchal story according to its simple sense.” [Cassuto, 2:150f] In support of this is the supposed reason why Noah cursed Ham’s son Canaan rather than Ham; since Noah was prevented from having more children, Noah cursed Ham’s children.

- **Ham committed incest with Noah’s wife (Ham’s mother / stepmother)** – Another proposal argues that the suppressed story concerned Ham’s incestuous relationship with Noah’s wife (stepmother?). The language ‘*see his father’s nakedness*’ is found in the Levitical litany of sexual taboos where ‘*nakedness*’ is a euphemism for sexual relations (Lev 18:6-18; 20:17). A parallel is found in Reuben’s affair with his father’s concubine, Bilhah, which results in his loss of privilege as firstborn (35:22; 49:3-4). Later Absalom attempted to secure his hold on the kingdom by going in to his father’s concubines (2 Sam 16:20-23). Noah’s curse against Canaan, the child of his incest, would be explained. [Mathews, 1:419; Wenham, 1:200; Hamilton, 1:322]

- **The sin was Canaan’s, although Ham leered at Noah and told his brothers** – “Canaan is associated with the event because he had a part in disgracing Noah. Some of the Sages say that he was the one who saw Noah and ran to tell his father (Rashi). According to Sforno, Ham gaze at – but did not protest – the indignity that Canaan had perpetrated upon Noah.” [Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, 44]

REASONS TO REJECT THE AFOREMENTIONED THEORIES — Without exception, those I am studying reject those theories for the following reasons.

- **Whatever was Ham’s sin, his brothers did not sin by merely ‘covering their father’s nakedness’ with ‘their faces turned away’** – The reason most cited is that regardless of what Ham may or may not have done, his brothers did not sin and are commended by merely ‘covering their father’s nakedness’ with ‘their faces turned away.’ “If in fact some lecherous deed occurred inside the tent, it is inexplicable why the covering of their father is in juxtaposition to Ham’s act. On other occasions Genesis is straightforward in its description of sexual misconduct (e.g., 19:5, 30-35; 34:2). There is no reason to assume that homosexuality or, for that matter, heterosexual misconduct would be described euphemistically by the author.” [Mathews, 1:419; see also Cassuto, 2:151; Hamilton, 1:322f; Custance, 109]

- **‘Saw’ is the common term for observing and does not necessarily convey the idea of homosexual act or lust** – The Hebrew word for ‘saw’ is a very common word, used just under 1300x in the OT. It is the common term for observing and does not necessarily convey the idea of sexual lust. Although the term may be used in this way (cf. 6:2; 34:2), such meaning must be derived from the context and not the term itself. The language used in Leviticus for the homosexual act is ‘*to lie with a male*’ (Lev 18:22; 20:13) which we do not find here. Heterosexual acts uses such expression as ‘*to see nakedness*’ (Lev 20:17) or ‘*to uncover nakedness*’ (Lev 18:6-19; 20:10-21), again, neither of which are used here, nor would Ham’s sin be a heterosexual sin. [Cassuto, 2:151f; Mathews, 1:419]

- **Ham’s behavior immediately following his sin argues against any overt sexual abuse of his father** – If Ham’s sin had involved a sordid act (whether it be a homosexual act, castration, or incest with Noah’s wife), he would not likely have immediately ran outside and told his brothers, nor would the Torah pass over such an inauspicious beginning for the detested Canaanites. [Ross, 215; Custance, 109]

● **If Ham had sexually abused Noah, it forces a nuance of abuse on ‘had done’** – If Ham had committed a physical act of some sort, it forces a nuance of abuse on to the verb ‘had done’ in v. 24. “The seeing itself and the conversation in which Ham ‘told’ the story ‘to his two brothers outside,’ that is to say, the derision he brought upon his father and the unchaste talk – these things are in themselves forbidden acts. Since these deeds dishonoured the father, even the words ‘to him’ after the verb ‘had done’ are understandable.” [Cassuto, 2:152; see also Hamilton, 1:322]

● **The fact no other children is mentioned as being born to Noah may be merely the desired form of the narrative** – Some who contend the sin was Noah being castrated by Ham (or Canaan) find support in the lack of mention of Noah having any more children than the three mentioned. They note all the other patriarchs are said to have had ‘other sons and daughters’ (5:3-32; 11:10-25). This lack of reference to other children, however, may be due to the author’s desire to parallel the Sethite and Shemite lines, which both end with three sons (5:32; 11:26). [Mathews, 1:418f]

● **Noah uncovered himself, not Ham** – Some who accept an unnatural act by Ham being perpetrated upon his Father refer to verses such as Lev 18:6-19; 20:10-21 where sexual sin is referred to euphemistically as ‘to uncover nakedness.’ The problem with that however is according to v. 21, Noah ‘uncovered himself’ (the stem is reflexive) and not Ham. If there had been any occurrence of sexual violation, one would have expected to read, ‘Ham uncovered his father’s nakedness.’ [Mathews, 1:419; Ross, 215]

● **Why we in our culture have a hard time with the natural reading of the text** – Although the most natural reading of the text is to take it as it stands, we in our modern Western culture believe there must have been something more to Ham’s offense. *This betrays a problem all expositors have when dealing with any text of Scripture: reading the Word of God with a mindset of the surroundings and culture of the time when it was written. Our culture is one where disrespecting one’s parents is the status quo, where we are constantly bombarded with nudity and sex, where many revel in the misfortunes of another person, and are thus strangers to a world where discretion and filial loyalty are supreme virtues. The Hebrew morality called for the utmost delicacy in such matters as evidenced by Shem and Japeth (v. 23). But many may easily read this narrative and not see any sin involved.* [Wenham, 1:200; Skinner, 1:183]

HAM’S SIN APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN SEVERAL — If we are to take the words at their face value, we see the possibility of a multiplicity of sins committed by Ham:

● **Possibly ‘prurient’ or ‘homosexual voyeurism’** – We must be careful here; there is nothing that explicitly states what Ham was thinking when he saw his father drunk and uncovered. Was there a sexual element to his thoughts or did he merely revel in the shame exhibited by his father? Ham’s response argues at the very least this was a transgression of sexual morality. In contrast, Ham’s brothers thought it sin merely to look at their father’s nakedness and took every effort not to do so.

● **Proclaiming the incident to others** – Nakedness was shameful in the Hebrew culture, as evidenced by the mistreatment of David’s envoy (2 Sam 10:4) and the public ridicule of the nations (Isa 20:4; 47:3; Mic 1:11). The Mosaic law guarded against the public exposure of the genitals and buttocks (e.g., Exod 20:26; 28:42). With the refined sensibility of the Hebrew culture at that time, Ham should have been either saddened or disgusted. Instead he

immediately ran to his brothers, delighted and eager to share the shame brought upon their father with others. Proverbs warns against unkind gossip, *'he who repeats a matter alienates a friend'* (17:9); how much more serious when that gossip adds to their parent's disgrace!

● **Dishonoring his father** — *Ultimately this was Ham's sin, regardless of what else was involved.* Throughout the ancient world and even today in traditional societies, honoring parents is a most sacred duty. Ham ridiculed his father's downfall, and in the ancient world striking or insulting one's parents was a serious matter that warranted the extreme penalty of death (Exod 21:15, 17; cf. Deut 21:18-21; cf. Mark 7:10). The book of Proverbs repeatedly urges devotion to parents and their instruction. The Fifth Commandment states, *'Honor your father and mother.'* To fail to do so means divine retaliation, for the crime is not against parent alone but is viewed as contempt for God's hierarchical order in creation. Shem and Japheth, unlike Ham, treated Noah with proper respect. They refused to take advantage of him despite his vulnerable condition. "Admittedly, the OT nowhere states how sons should handle situations where parents are disgracing themselves. But no doubt Israelites would have agreed with the Ugaritic Aqht epic which states that a son should take his father *'by the hand when he's drunk, carries him when he's sated with wine.'* In other words, he must try tactfully to cover up his father's folly. But this is precisely what Ham did not do." [Wenham, 1:199f; see also Mathews, 1:420]

NOAH'S DRUNKENNESS WAS THE IMPETUS USED TO REVEAL WHAT WAS IN HIS SONS' HEARTS — *The saying, 'trials reveal character,' may not be Scripture but I believe it to be Scriptural. The reason why Ham did what he did is not stated here; all we are able to do is surmise what was in his heart by what he revealed by his actions (Matt 12:33-35; 15:18, 19).*

Ham's disrespect for his father (and thus extended towards his father's God) will grow as leaven until eventually Canaan's rampant sexual perversions will become so wicked *'that the land will vomit them out'* (see Lev. 18:24-30; Deut. 12:29-32). Like unbelievers who rejoice and mock when a believer falls into sin, Ham possibly felt a sense of release from all the inhibitions which had until now suppressed his own desires and ambitions. "A much more probable interpretation of Ham's actions here is that they expressed a long-hidden resentment of his father's authority and moral rectitude. There was apparently a carnal and rebellious bent to Ham's nature, thus far restrained by the spiritual strength and patriarchal authority of his father.... [It] was one of rebellion against his father's authority, plus resentment against the entire moral standard that had been taught and enforced by Noah in his family for well over a hundred years. Fundamentally, his act revealed an attitude of resentment against God Himself, a character trait which was bound to crop out explosively some day, if not in Ham, then in his children." [Morris, 235; see also Waltke, 149]

told his two brothers outside — Beholding his father's human weakness, Ham was eager to share Noah's shame with his brothers. His father whom he was to honor was instead made an object of derision. Undoubtedly he thought they too would join in with his open mocking. "Ham saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without. Not content with finding pleasure himself in his father's shame, ... he must proclaim his disgraceful pleasure to his brethren, and thus exhibit his shameless sensuality. The brothers, on the contrary, with reverential modesty covered their father with a garment, walking backwards that they might not see his nakedness (ver. 23), and thus manifesting their childlike reverence as truly as their refined purity and modesty. For this they receive their father's blessing, whereas Ham reaped for his son Canaan the patriarch's curse." [Keil, 1:155f]

Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. —

The elaborate efforts Shem and Japheth made to avoid looking at their father demonstrate that what Ham did in the tent was confined to seeing. In contrast to the terse brevity with which Ham's deed is described, the description of Shem and Japheth's response is distinctly repetitious and long-winded. The narrative is slowed down so that the reader can appreciate their meritorious deeds and their utter propriety. Here proper and honourable conduct is spoken of; hence it is not desirable to shorten the narration. This slower pace allows the reader not only to reflect on these sons' modesty, but to visualize the awkwardness of their task. Backing into a tent trying to cover their sleeping father without looking at him must have been quite a tricky operation! '*Put it over their shoulders*' is another detail that helps slow down the story-telling. Perhaps we are to envisage the sons backing into the tent until Noah's toes are seen in front of the cloak, and then their letting it down over him. [Wenham, 1:200; Cassuto, 2:162]

a garment, — literally, '*the garment.*' They used '*a cloak*' to cover Noah, the outer daytime garment also used as a blanket at night (Exod 22:26). While not demanded, it is possible the definite article is used to denote it was actually Noah's cloak and that Ham had brought it outside as proof of his story. But many say the definite article merely serves to express a '*general definition*' in accordance with established Biblical usage; i.e., '*the particular garment that they took, the cloak Shem and Japheth used on this occasion.*'

laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered their father's nakedness; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. — Shem and Japheth are as commendable as Ham is obnoxious. They are restrained and respectful enough to cover their nude father. "The narrator highlights the honorable character of Shem and Japheth with the elaborate description of their actions. The shameless sensuality of Ham, the modesty of Japheth and Shem, marked a difference in common morality." [Waltke, 149] "The expression '*their father's nakedness*,' which occurs here twice, echoes the words '*his father's nakedness*' in v. 22; this threefold use of the phrase serves to emphasize it. The details of the story have to be understood as follows: When they approached the tent and entered it, '*they walked backward*,' that means, not in the direction of their faces but of their backs, and when they drew near to their father, they cast the garment that was on their shoulders over him, and in this way '*they covered his nakedness*;' also at the moment when they covered him they turned their '*faces backwards*,' that is to say, they turned their heads away and looked behind them so as not to gaze on their father until they had finished covering him. Thus '*they did not see their father's nakedness.*'" [Cassuto, 2:163]

POETIC FORM — According to Rabbi Cassuto, at this point the style assumes an almost poetic form and shows signs of parallelism. The Rabbi arranges the verse as follows:

and walked backward / and covered their father's nakedness;

their faces were turned away, / and they did not see their father's nakedness.

The clause '*and walked backward*' is paralleled by the clause '*their faces were turned away*;' the words '*and they did not see their father's nakedness*' is paralleled by the clause '*and covered their father's nakedness.*' [Cassuto, 2:162f]

WINE — “To be sure, wine was not forbidden in Israel. It was used to cheer the heart (Judg 9:13; Ps 104:15), and as a sedative (Prov 31:6). The Nazirite vow of abstention from wine would be meaningless if Israel as a nation already abstained. Nevertheless, the Bible does not hesitate to condemn winebibbing (Prov 23:29-35), and even equates it with harlotry (Hos 4:10-11, 18), which numbs the longing for God. The two incidents in Genesis describing drunkenness (here and 19:31ff) become the occasion for sins of debauchery.” [Hamilton, 1:321] “Wine can bring joy, when drunk in moderation, moral laxity and sorrow, when drunk in excess.... Noah fulfills his father’s dream that his son would bring comfort from the painful toil of the earth by beginning the science of growing grapes and of making wine, which uniquely gives people joy. The same text, however, illustrates its grave dangers. The rest of Scripture likewise both looks favorably on wine (Num. 15:5-10; Deut. 14:26; Ps. 104:15; John 2:1-11) and soberly warns of its dangers (Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21, 29-35; Isa. 5:22; 28:7), especially moral laxity as displayed in self-exposure (Lam. 4:21; Hab. 2:15). The holy Nazirite (Num. 6:3-4), the officiating priests (Lev. 10:9), and rulers making decisions (Prov. 31:4-5) abstain from it. John abstains from it; Jesus does not (Matt. 11:17-19).” [Waltke, 148, 159] “Planting a vineyard does not seem problematic; the vine in the Bible is considered noble. The psalmist described wine as God’s provision, stating that it ‘gladdens the heart of man’ (104:15). A parable in Judges has a vine saying, ‘*Should I give up my wine, which cheers both God and men?*’ (9:13). Not only did the fruit of the vine alleviate the pain of the curse of the ground (cf. Gen 5:29), but it also formed the symbol of the coming bliss in the messianic age. Zechariah 8:12 and Isaiah 25:6 describe the future age with this motif (cf. the point of the turning of the water to wine in John 2 as a sign). Although wine alleviates to some degree the painful toil of this life, the Old Testament warned of the moral dangers attending this new step in human enterprise. Those who served the Lord in the temple (Lev 10:9), those taking vows (Num 6:2-4), and those making leadership decisions (Prov 31:4-5) were warned of its use. ***The story of Noah shows two degrading effects of the abuse of wine – drunkenness and nakedness. While no blame is attached to his planting the vineyard, it is difficult to ignore the prophetic oracles that use nakedness and drunkenness in their descriptions of chaotic tragedies (see, e.g., Hab 2:15; Lam 4:21). The Old Testament may not have prohibited the use of wine for everyone, but it never excused drunkenness and nakedness.***” [Ross, 213] “Wine is seen as one of God’s gifts to man (Ps 104:15). Every burnt or peace offering had to be accompanied by a libation of wine (Num 15:5-10), and Deut 14:26 encourages its purchase at the festivals. Indeed, the vine was one of Israel’s national symbols (Isa 5:1-7; Mark 12:1-11). However, running through the same literature there is frequent mention of the dangers of wine. A key element of the Nazirite vow (the Nazirites were the holiest laymen in ancient Israel) was abstinence from any alcohol or product of the vine (Num 6:3-4). Priests were forbidden drink before officiating in the sanctuary ‘*lest you die*’ (Lev 10:9). Clearly, insobriety was regarded as incompatible with holiness. And the ordinary laity are warned about the dangers of drinking too much wine (Isa 5:22; Prov 21:17; 23:20-21, 29-35). Men ‘*are confused with wine ... they err in vision*’ (Isa 28:7). Drunkenness in particular is deprecated (1 Sam 1:14), especially when it leads to self-exposure (Hab 2:15; Lam 4:21), and its punishment is used by the prophets as an image of divine judgment (Isa 63:6; Jer 51:57). To uncover oneself is regarded as not merely publicly demeaning (e.g., 2 Sam 6:16), but incompatible with living in the presence of God (Exod 20:26; Deut 23:13-15 [12-14]; cf. Gen 3:21).” [Wenham, 1:199]