

## CURSED BE CANAAN

### **“Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers” (Gen. 9:25)**

This verse has been a source of controversy for centuries. Here is some background. After the flood Noah planted a vineyard, drank of its wine, became drunk, and lay naked in his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, “saw” his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside. His brothers, Shem and Japheth, took a garment, laid it across their shoulders, then walked in backwards and covered their fathers nakedness. Thus they did not “see” their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his “youngest son” had “done” to him he pronounced the above mentioned curse on Canaan. The problem is, if Ham did something wrong, why was Canaan cursed?

### WHO WAS NOAH’S YOUNGEST SON?

Perhaps the key to solving this mystery involves identifying Noah’s youngest son. Noah, as you know, had three sons. They are first mentioned in Gen. 5:32: **“After Noah was 500 years old, he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth”.**

It is logical to assume that these three sons are listed in chronological order. This would mean that Shem was born first, then Ham, and then Japheth. These sons are consistently listed in this same order: (See Gen. 6:10; 7:13; 9:18; 10:1; 1 Chron. 1:4). Thus Japheth, not Ham, would be the youngest of Noah’s three immediate sons.

While not everyone uses the NIV version of the Bible, let us note what seems to be a mistranslation of Genesis 10:21. The NIV translates this verse as though Japheth was the older brother of Shem. **“Sons were also born to Shem, whose older brother was Japheth” (Gen. 10:21 NIV).** Fortunately they put in a footnote which corrects this and states **“Shem, the older brother of Japheth”.** This would be in harmony with the above verses naming Shem as the oldest, then Ham and then Japheth. A number of other translations also translate Gen. 10:21 naming Shem as the older brother. Naming Shem as the older brother does not conflict with other Scriptures. The Bibles stating that Shem was the older brother include: The New Living Translation, The English Standard Version, The Berean Study Bible, The New American Standard Bible, the Christian Standard Bible, The Good News Translation, The Holman Christian Standard Bible, The International Standard Version, The NET Bible, The New Heart English Bible, etc. etc. We therefore conclude that the text of the NIV is wrong and the footnote is correct. Shem was, in fact, the older brother of Japheth!

We have taken these pains to help us understand the identity of Noah’s “youngest son”. While Ham “saw his father’s nakedness” he was not Noah’s the “youngest son”. Further, Ham only “saw” his father’s nakedness, while the “youngest son” “did” something to Noah. Note: It was **“When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him”** that he pronounced the curse upon Canaan.

### PLEASE CONSIDER THAT CANAAN WAS THE YOUNGEST SON

The word “son”, as you know, sometimes refers to a descendant rather than an immediate son. Jesus, as you know is repeatedly referred to as the “son of David” (Matt. 1:1; 9:27; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9; 21:15; 22:42; etc.) Jesus, of course, was not the immediate son of David as they lived centuries apart.

As a descendant of David, however, Jesus was still correctly called the “son of David”. Therefore it is quite possible that Canaan was Noah’s “youngest son” referred to in the curse. Canaan was indeed a “descendant” of Noah. He was his grandson. It is also possible that he was the youngest descendant of Noah at the time and also the evil person who “did” something to his drunken grandfather.

In Genesis 10:6 the sons of Ham are listed in this order: **“Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan”**. This would make Canaan the youngest of Ham’s four sons, and as we have suggested, quite possibly also the youngest descendant of Noah.

Two times in the narrative we are reminded that Ham was the father of Canaan: **“Ham was the father of Canaan” (Gen. 9:18)**. **“Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness” (Gen. 9:22)**. Since no other grandchildren are mentioned in the narrative this adds credence to the idea that Canaan was the “youngest son” who actually “did” something to Noah.

Thus when Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his “youngest son” or “youngest descendant” had “done” to him he pronounced upon him the curse upon Canaan where it belonged.

#### WHAT DID CANAAN DO TO HIS GRANDFATHER?

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden they were both naked, but felt no shame (Gen. 2:25). After they sinned, however, they were ashamed of their nakedness and sewed fig leaves together to make coverings for themselves (Gen. 3:7). Thereafter man was prohibited from gazing upon the nakedness of someone else. For example, the Lord said his people were not to **“go up to my altar on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it” (Ex. 20:26)**. In the book of Leviticus “uncovering someone’s nakedness” was another way of saying that you had sexual relations with them. In Leviticus 18:6-19 (KJV), for example, there are 22 prohibitions against uncovering someone’s nakedness. The list specifically includes uncovering the nakedness of a wide variety of in-laws and relatives. In more modern translations “uncovering nakedness” is translated as having “sexual relations”.

While the exact nature of the “youngest son’s” crime is not revealed, the following assumptions are in order:

- Whatever was done to Noah was so reprehensible that it merited a curse upon the descendants of Canaan.
- We should not be surprised that sin has consequences. Adam’s sin, as you know, has affected the whole world (Rom. 5:12). Cain’s sin affected the ground and also condemned him to forever be a restless wanderer on the earth (Gen. 4:12).
  - The Ten Commandments warn that a man’s sins will affect his children for three or four generations (Ex. 20:5).
  - Gehazi sinned and his leprosy infected his descendants forever (2 Ki. 5:27).
  - David sinned and the sword never departed from his house and someone close to him would lie with his wives in broad daylight (2 Sam. 12:10-12).
  - Etc.

- The New Testament Scriptures also remind us that our actions cannot be isolated so that they have no influence on others. **“None of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone” (Rom. 14:7).**
- Abel was the first person to experience physical death, yet he still speaks (Heb. 11:4). After we die we too will continue to speak. The life we now live will determine what we say after we are dead.
- While we do not know exactly what Noah’s youngest son did to him, we do know that it affected the descendants of Canaan for generations.
  - Canaan was to be the lowest of slaves to his brothers (Gen. 9:25)
  - Canaan was to be the slave of Shem (Gen. 9:26).
  - Canaan was also to be the slave of Japheth (Gen. 9:27).
  - These prophetic insights of Noah came true. Canaan’s brethren became world leaders in Babylon, Egypt, and Assyria (Gen. 10:8-12). Canaan did not!

### GOD JUDGES US AS INDIVIDUALS

Every person is saved or condemned as an individual. Ezekiel made this clear: **“the soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him” (Ez. 18:20).**

- If your father was an alcoholic you will not be condemned for his sin at the Judgement, but his sinful legacy may very well make your life on earth more difficult.
- If you were a Canaanite your life would be difficult as a slave, but you would not be guilty of what Noah’s youngest son did to him.
- Tamar was a Canaanite (Gen. 38:1ff.) This, however, did not keep her from being an ancestor to Jesus (Matt. 1:3).
- Rahab was also a Canaanite, yet by faith she was transformed into a follower of Jehovah (Heb. 11:31; Ja. 2:25). She was also honored by being an ancestor of Jesus (Matt. 1:5).
- Jesus healed the daughter of a Canaanite woman because she had such “great faith” (Matt. 15:28).
- God judges us as individuals. The church at Thyatira was a bad church. These bad people would be condemned if they did not repent. But there were some at this bad church who were good people. God required nothing of them but simply to **“hold on to what you have until I come” (Rev. 2:18-29).**
- No matter what race, kindred, or people you belong to, you can still choose to follow Jesus and be saved! Remember this command of Christ: **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:18-20).**

Remember! **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit” (Gal. 3:13, 14).**

PRAISE GOD, IN CHRIST WE CAN BE REDEEMED FROM EVERY CURSE!

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