



Part 27 – New World, Old Problems

Genesis 9:18-29

Genesis chapter 9 narrates a new beginning in human history. Noah stands at the headwaters of a new humanity in a new world. And yet some things have not changed at all – namely, mankind and sin. Man is still a sinner. To be sure, there remains among the human family the distinction

between those who treasure their sin and those who strive for godliness. There remains the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. But as this passage demonstrates, even the best among us still sin.

1. God keeps his promises.

Vv. 18-19

- Here the focus shifts from Noah to his three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Once again the theme of future generations takes prominence. We will see that the lines of Shem and Japheth will preserve godliness on the earth. Ham and his descendants will launch a new advance of moral degradation. The Hamites will include such peoples as the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Canaanites. We are prepared for this trajectory by the mention twice of Ham's son Canaan. Keep in mind that Moses wrote Genesis during the Exodus wanderings. The people were well aware of the Canaanites, their wickedness, and the Divine mandate to cleanse the land of their presence.
- The theme of God as promise keeper is a recurring theme in Genesis and throughout the Pentateuch (the first 5 books of the Bible). Indeed, that God is faithful to his promises is a thread which runs through all of the Scriptures. The Bible is after all the account of God's promise keeping. It is the narrative of human history which records God's faithfulness to his promise to save his people from their sin through the Savior he would send.
- As the narrative turns to Noah's sons, the grand theme of God's faithfulness to his promises focuses close (as it often does) on just a few individuals. The three sons of Noah were scattered or dispersed as God had commanded (9:1). This moving out and multiplying on the part of Noah's sons is an expression of God's faithfulness to his original gospel promise (3:15) to extend the righteous line of Seth ("the seed of the woman") culminating in the arrival of the Messiah. The arrival of every succeeding generation of humanity is God's faithfulness to have for himself a vast number of people from every nation (12:2; 17:4-8).

2. Sin is degrading and corrupting.

Vv. 20-23

- Noah and his sons went about the work of culture building as had been done before in the days of Cain and Cain's sons. In this case one example is offered – Noah's cultivation of grapes and the making of wine. As much as some would like, this passage is not about the evils of wine. Elsewhere in the Bible, God commends the use of strong drink to be used in Israel's celebrations. Psalm 104 tells us that wine makes the heart glad. Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana – his first recorded miracle in John's gospel. And Paul recommends that Timothy drink a little wine for his upset stomach. So Noah is not sinning by cultivating grapes or by making and drinking wine. The sin of Noah is drunkenness. As drunkenness so often does, it leads to self-degradation. Noah is described as unconscious and

naked in his tent. Such a tragic scene when contrasted to his altar building and sacrificial offerings recorded in the preceding verses.

- But as sad as Noah's sin of drunkenness is, Ham's sin is all the more outrageous and consequential. What we know is that Ham took some sort of perverse pleasure in the nakedness of his father. Not only that, Ham made the matter exponentially worse by making public his father's humiliation. Ham showed remarkable disrespect for his father accompanied by a strong note of sexual voyeurism.
- The moral insanity of sin is seen both in Noah's drunkenness and Ham's far worse degrading disrespect for his father; a sin which will contribute to the rise of the wicked Canaanites. How is it that those who saw first-hand the terror of God's judgement and his kind mercy now enter into sin so flagrantly? Of course, similar questions could be asked of us who have drunk so deeply of the grace of God in Jesus Christ but nevertheless find justifications to sin.

3. God remains committed to justice.

Vv. 24-29

- Genesis chapter 9 preserves its emphasis on the unity of mankind by tracing the origins of all human life back to Noah who himself descended from the first man Adam. Though it has been, this passages should never be used as a justification for chattel slavery, racial superiority, or racial separatism. As the sons of Noah disperse throughout the earth and give rise to families and nations so too will rise "specializations within that unity. But racial roles are superseded in the New Testament, where 'there cannot be Greek and Jew,...barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all' (Col. 3:11). Any attempt to grade the branches of mankind by an appeal to verses 25-27 is therefore a re-erecting of what God has demolished."¹
- The only words of Noah the Bible records are found here. They are prophetic words of judgment and blessing. The judgment is directed toward Canaan, the son of Ham. The rationale for the judgment upon Canaan is most likely grounded in the fact that he will "inherit his father's decadence (Lev. 18:3: Deut. 9:3). In addition to the Canaanites, Ham's descendants include some of Israel's most bitter enemies: Egypt, Philistia, Assyria, Babylon (10:6-13). Behind Noah's prophecy is the concept of corporate solidarity. The ancestors reproduce their own kind."²
- Noah pronounces prophetic blessing upon Shem from whom will come the *Semite* or Hebrew people. Beginning in chapter 12 we will see the beginnings of fulfillment of this prophecy with the calling of Abram. Noah also pronounces blessing upon Japheth from whom will come nations of Gentiles who will be grafted into the vine of God's people. "Noah's righteousness is reproduced in Shem and Japheth...The hubris of Ham against his father will be worked out in his descendants, and the modesty of Shem and Japheth in theirs."³
- As powerful a principle as family or corporate solidarity is in the Scriptures, it should not be confused with fatalism. In other words, just because someone was born a descendant of Ham did not guarantee that they would follow in his example of sin. Indeed, God will promise to make of Abram a vast nation (15:5) which will ultimately include people from among all the nations in the world (Rev. 7:9). What is more, Rahab, a Canaanite, is found in the genealogy of Jesus and remembered as a woman of faith (Heb. 11:31).
- Noah was a paragon of virtue, despite his remaining sin. He was a godly and righteous man who stood alone in a violent and immoral generation. But he was still just a man as verse 21 displays. In Noah's failure we are reminded that no matter how virtuous some of our fellows may be, we must ultimately look to God, not man, for salvation. Noah needed the same Savior we need.

¹ Derek Kidner, Genesis (IVP: Downers Grove, 1967) p. 103

² Bruce Waltke, Genesis (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001) p. 150

³ Ibid