

Text: Genesis 9:18-29

Title: "The curse of sin and the promise of salvation"

Time: Sunday, March 30, 2008 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: I once took a class on something called "Historiography," and I learned there that historiography is the study of the history of writing history. It turns out that there are various approaches to the task of writing history. There are various interpretations of what drives the history of the world. Some have emphasized the importance of military power, others have emphasized economic forces, and still others the idea of political intrigue or social revolution or philosophical underpinnings.

The Bible is a book about the history of the world, and it describes the history of the world as a product not of the forces of nature, but rather as a product of the curse of man's sin and the promise of God's salvation. World history resumes with the post-diluvian era in our passage today (9:18-19). Noah exits the ark, and we begin to read again the history of the world, the story of the curse of sin and the promise of salvation. Those two topics will be our focus this morning.

I. The curse of sin plagues the human condition (vv. 18-25).

Illustration: The Black Death, or the Black Plague, was one of the most deadly pandemics in human history, widely thought to have been caused by a bacterium named *Yersinia pestis*. It probably began in Central Asia and spread to Europe by the late 1340s. The total number of deaths worldwide from the pandemic is estimated at 75 million people; there were an estimated 25-50 million deaths in Europe alone. The Black Death is estimated to have killed 30-60% of Europe's population. It may have reduced the world's population from an estimated 450 million to between 350 and 375 million in 1400.

The same disease is thought to have returned to Europe every generation with varying virulence and mortalities until the 1700s. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death, 3/28/08]

At the end of the 19th century, the bacterium causing the plague was identified, and today treating it involves a regimen of antibiotics. The key to dealing with this disease that has plagued mankind is correct identification and treatment. Our passage correctly identifies man's problem as sin, and it describes some of the characteristics of this cursed problem.

A. The curse of sin is hereditary (9:18, 22). Did you notice in our description of the Black Plague how it kept coming back generation after generation? Our passage emphasizes here that Ham was the father of Canaan. He is not simply Ham. He is always Ham the father of Canaan. As Moses writes this account, he is undoubtedly aware of the implications of this curse prophesied by Noah about Ham's descendent Canaan. Ham has sinned, but this sin would resurface again in a virulent form in the descendants of his son Canaan. Once that outburst of sin was complete, God would use Canaan's brothers, the Semites – Israel, to oppress and defeat them. Noah's prophecy regarding Canaan in response to the sin of his father Ham is an introduction to the Abrahamic covenant that Moses is going to deal with later (Gen. 15:12-16, 17:7-8).

Application: So the curse of sin is hereditary. Ham had sinned, and Canaan was going to sin also, and sin brings the curse of God's judgment. There is no way to blame society for all this, for society had been wiped out. It is the evil of the human heart that produces the curse of sin on mankind and oneself.

B. The curse of sin requires that man work in order to eat (9:20). The text does not dwell for long on this point, but it does say that Noah planted a vineyard. Noah did not go to the local government office and get food stamps so that he could have some grapes at the grocery store. No, the curse of sin

means that man has to work in order to eat. Noah believed that, and he showed leadership for his family in this regard—v. 20 indicates that he was the first of the survivors of the flood to become a farmer and plant a vineyard. We ought to eat only what we earn and work for, for testimony's sake.

C. The curse of sin makes good things evil [9:21-24].

Illustration: I am told that the main carrier of the Black Plague bacteria is the oriental rat flea. People can still get the Black Plague if they come in contact with one of these fleas. The flea is not itself deadly; only the bacteria that it so effectively carries.

Our passage mentions two carriers when it comes to the plague of sin, things that are not evil in themselves, but things that sin uses for evil.

1. Wine is a carrier of the curse of sin (v. 21, 24). The Bible is very clear that wine is a mocker and deceiver, isn't it? When we remember that, we always also need to understand that the wine of the Bible normally involved a natural fermentation process, not the distillation technologies that are used today to create substances that are far more potent in their ability to deceive.

Noah was a great man of God when he was deceived by wine. Leupold describes the tragedy of Noah's fall this way: "He who maintained his ground over against a wicked and godless world, neglecting watchfulness and prayer in a time of comparative safety, which should have been easy to meet. It is not the young and untried Noah who sins. It is the seasoned man of God, ripe in experience, who is here brought low" (345). We have seen the power of wine as a carrier for the curse of sin in some of our contemporary fundamental leaders whose lives otherwise remind us of righteous Noah. Noah fell before this deceiver, and he was better than we.

2. Nakedness is a carrier of the curse of sin (v. 22-23). Shem and Japheth are exemplary in their determination not to see the nakedness of their father. They did not toy with it the way Ham did, or the way Noah toyed with wine. Noah's drunkenness resulted in his nakedness, and his nakedness results in Ham shaming him. Pagan cultures always have a very casual attitude about both wine and nakedness, but remember that nakedness is at the very core of the shame of man's sin. We see that in this passage, but v. 22 also echoes back to Gen. 3:11, where God asks Adam and Eve, "Who told you that you were naked?" The same word for *told* occurs in both passages. Where you see the spread of the plague of sin in a culture, you find a very casual attitude about wine and nakedness. As God's people, we ought to have a testimony of careful abstinence and modesty for the glory of God.

D. The curse of sin results in bondage (v. 25). Once again, we notice that Noah's prophecy predicts the conquest of Canaan, and so it was fulfilled in the days of Joshua. But the prophecy does more than this. It emphasizes the effects of the sin of the Canaanites as that of bondage. The phrase, *a servants of servants* is emphatic. Sin is a cruel taskmaster that enslaves its victims. The Lord Jesus made this point very clear during his earthly ministry when He said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin" (John 8:34). Man's relationship to sin is never colleague to colleague, or friend to friend, or beneficiary to benefactor. Man's relationship to sin is always slave to cruel taskmaster. Sin intends to own us, use us, curse us, and destroy us.

II. The promise of salvation heals the human condition (vv. 26-28).

A. Salvation brings glory to God (v. 26).

Illustration: I received a call this past week from an outfit down in Texas that is selling the latest and greatest Bible study

curriculum. The salesman on the phone told me that the newest series they had was “You Matter More than You Think.” Their website describes the study this way: “In this poignant and vulnerable women’s study, Leslie Parrot shows you how each hodgepodge piece of your life, no matter how haphazard, represents a part of what you do and who you are. While on the surface, none of these pieces may seem to make a terribly dramatic impact, Leslie will show you how they are your life and how when they are collected into a loving human heart, they become a treasure.

“Leslie and her husband Les have sold over a million copies of their books. They are the co-authors of *Saving Your Marriage Before It Starts*, *Your Time-Starved Marriage*, *Love Talk*, *Becoming Soul Mates* and many other marriage and parenting related books. Les and Leslie have been featured on eHarmony, Oprah, The View, CNN, Focus on the Family and in the *USA Today* and *The New York Times*.” [<http://www.bluefishtv.com/ProductDetails,3/28/08>].

Application: Christianity in today’s world has become very man-centered. We are all being taught to believe that we matter more than we think. But did you notice that the blessing Noah prophecies here does not go to Shem, it rather goes to the God of Shem, Yahweh. Man’s understanding of the promise of salvation is that it is supposed to be a blessing to man; Noah’s prophecy teaches us that God’s promise of salvation is supposed to be a blessing to God, a big difference indeed.

B. The promise of salvation is the promise of a Divine Descendant (v. 26).

Illustration: There are many parallels between this poem that Noah prophecies, and the protoevangelium that we saw in Genesis 3:15. Henry Morris notices these in his treatment of this passage: “It is significant that, as the great prophecy of

Genesis 3:15-19 was given as a result of the fall of Adam, this prophecy was given as a result of the fall of Noah.

“The parallel between the two situations is striking. Both Adam and Noah were commanded to fill the earth and exercise control over it. Each of them is actually the ancestor of all men in the present world. Each sinned by partaking of a fruit—Noah of the fruit of the vine and Adam of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. As a result, each became naked and then was provided with a covering by someone else. Finally, the prophecy resulted in a curse which has affected mankind ever since. Along with the curse, however, there were also blessing and anticipation of ultimate salvation” (237).

Application: This is tremendous insight, and I would add to these parallels the fact that both passages promise salvation in the form of a coming descendant. Note that just as the curse lands not on Ham, but rather his descendant, so the blessing lands not on Shem, but on his God. Hamilton comments: “The curse is directed not against Ham but against Canaan, and the blessing is directed not toward Shem but toward his Lord. The blessing directed to Yahweh matches the curse directed at Canaan” (325). I believe that the parallelism indicates that Canaan and God have something in common, i.e. that they are the descendants of these postdiluvian fathers. What is implicit here becomes explicit only two chapters later as the line of Shem is used to introduce the Abrahamic covenant (11:10-32). Note with me two other things about the promise.

(1) The descendant is divine. Noah’s prophecy goes even beyond the promise of Genesis 3 in that it indicates that this descendant of Shem would actually be God Himself. Noah says one of two things in verse 27, either “Let him [Japheth] dwell in the tents of Shem,” or “Let him [God] dwell in the tents of Shem.” Given the history of Gentile oppression of the Jewish people, it is very difficult to understand this prophecy in terms of Japheth living at peace with Shem. In addition, the

apostle John tells us very clearly in his Gospel that the Word who was God (John 1:1) became flesh and “tabernacled” or dwelt in a tent among us (John 1:14). Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the prophecy of Noah because He is Shem’s Divine Descendant. God became man to dwell in the tents of Shem.

(2) The descendant is gracious. Ham was the youngest son (v. 24), and of the two others Shem is evidently younger than Japheth (10:21, KJV). Yet Shem is always mentioned first, and Japheth always last: “Shem, Ham, and Japheth.” The choice of Shem as the father of the promised seed agrees with a principle that we see repeated throughout Genesis, that the elder shall serve the younger, so that the gracious nature of salvation’s promise might be emphasized. It is not the greatness of the firstborn forefather that makes salvation’s plan a reality; it is the greatness of God’s grace to chose those who in no way deserve salvation’s promise in themselves.

C. The promise of salvation is God’s love for us (v. 27-29).

Application: We see God’s love in this passage, and it is out of God’s love that His promise of salvation blooms. God’s awful holiness gives us the need for salvation in view of our sin; but God’s amazing love gives us salvation’s plan.

D. The promise of salvation redeems the slave (vv. 26-27).

Application: The prophecy of Noah ends with a prayer that even cursed Canaan, the destitute slave of sin, might become the servant of the God of Shem instead. This is redemption. To be bought out of the bondage of sin and to be enlisted in the service of a new Master, the God of Shem, who became a man and died on the cross soHis shed blood could purchase us from bondage to sin.

We see some examples of this great prophecy even from the days of Joshua. The author of Hebrews says of the Canaanite

harlot Rahab, “By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish along with those who were disobedient, after she had welcomed the spies in peace.”

Conclusion: God’s plan of salvation means that even the lost Canaanite could become God’s servant by faith. Do you have the faith of Rahab this morning? Are you ready to be saved from your sin?

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching