Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Last time we looked at the Fall of Noah. We saw that he sinned by getting drunk and naked. And then his youngest son, Ham, having seen his father like that, dishonoured him by telling his brothers what he had seen. And then his brothers carefully covered their father up. And we learned some valuable sin and gospel lessons from that part of this passage.

Well, as the passage continues, the influence of the excess wine that Noah drunk wore off, and he woke up and came back to his senses. And however it happened, we are told that “*he knew what his youngest son had done to him*.” And Noah then prophesied. And that is what his words of curse and blessing are – prophecy. This is not just Noah expressing his feelings, having found out what his sons have done; this is Noah, now under the influence of the Holy Spirit, declaring the Word of God. And the Spirit of the Lord has enabled him to see in the actions of his sons something more significant than just their behaviour in this moment.

You see, after Adam’s Fall, God told him about the curse that he had brought down on creation. He said that all humanity would be divided into two groups – the seed of the serpent line, the line of unbelief and opposition to God, and the seed of the woman line, the line of belief and friendship with God. And God said that He would put **enmity between these two lines**.

And we saw then that this enmity is a dominant theme in the Bible. Wherever we are in the Bible, this enmity will help us understand what is happening: Who represents the two lines in the account? How is God advancing His salvation plans through the seed of the woman line?

And in this episode, Noah, with the help of the Holy Spirit, sees that what has happened is evidence of this enmity. And the enmity is *within his own family*! And there will be generational and salvation consequences that arise out of what happened, as we shall see.

But a major difficulty here is **why Noah cursed Ham’s son, Canaan, when it was Ham who sinned?** And so, with the remainder of our time this afternoon, we want to look at **the prophecy of Noah** and try and understand why it was Canaan who was cursed, and **how God’s promise of enmity will unfold in Noah’s descendants**. And in contrast with this morning’s sermon, which had a lot of practical application, this will be more of a big picture of salvation sermon. But there will be application that arises from this also.

1. So, let’s begin with **the curse on Canaan**. Noah said in verse 25, “*Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers*.”
   1. And as I said a moment ago, **a** **difficulty here is why Canaan gets cursed when it was his father, Ham, who sinned**? And this is because we instinctively dislike the idea of a son getting punished for the sins of his father, don’t we. I bet every son or daughter here would be furious to cop it in the neck for something that their parent did. That seems fundamentally unjust, doesn’t it? And so, commentators go to extraordinary lengths to try and clean up what seems to be such an obvious injustice.
      1. For example, some say that this is an error, or that this is the result of people adding to or changing Bible stories over the centuries. But we must reject any such suggestion. The Bible is without error, and we still have what each original author wrote, because God has supervised the copying of the Bible down through the ages. But even among those who hold the Bible to be God’s inerrant word, one minister suggested that in Hebrew thinking, the reference to Noah’s “***youngest son****,*” in verse 24, doesn’t necessarily have to mean just his own sons, but can include any of his descendants. So, he suggested that Canaan, as his youngest grandson, is the person in view already in verse 24. And he infers from this that it was Canaan who first saw Noah naked in the tent, who then told his father, who then told his brothers. Now, is that possible? Perhaps. But it simply does not say that in the text. It says that Ham saw his father and told his two brothers.
      2. So, again, **why does Canaan get the curse when Ham sinned**? Well, let’s remember, again, what we said earlier about the context of enmity between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. We must keep that in mind as we are trying to interpret Bible accounts. And in terms of how the Lord deals with these two lines, let me read out to you some very well-known words from the Ten Commandments: For there, in relation to the second commandment, the Lord says that He will show “*love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments*.” And we like that, don’t we. We like the idea of God’s covenant love for one person extending down from one generation to the next and the next and the next. And there will be some of us here today who can testify that as far back as we can trace, there is faith in our forebears, and we can see faith in our children and grandchildren. And this is a most wonderful reality! But do you remember what the Lord said before the words about showing love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and obey His commandments? He said, “*You shall not bow down to [idols] or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me*.” The NIV puts it like this: “*punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me*.” Oh!
         1. Now, just to be clear, these are **general covenant truthes**. God is not saying that every believer will be followed by a thousand generations of faith or that no descendant of an unbeliever can possibly come to faith within three to four generations. But generally, there are generational consequences of belief and unbelief. And there is a whole other sermon there. There are all sorts of things that we could work through in relation to that truth. But, most simply, God does visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. But notice the grace of God even in this truth. For even though the numbers are not meant to be exact, the proportions are striking – three-four generations of unbelief, but a *thousand* generations of belief! This is abundant grace!
      3. But returning to our major point, which is why Canaan gets cursed, here are some other points to take into account:
         1. Back in chapter 9:1 we are told that “***God blessed Noah and his sons***.” And that includes Ham. And so, as one already blessed of God, it would not be fitting for him to now be cursed.
         2. Another thing to take into account is **God’s sovereign purposes in election**. You see, God knows the eternal destiny of every person. And this destiny is not based on their obedience or disobedience, or God seeing ahead of time who will believe in Christ or reject Him.
            1. **Romans 9:10-13** is very clear about this: For there we see that before Esau and Jacob were born and had done either good or bad, “*in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of his call*, God said, “*Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.*” God knew and had predestined that Jacob would be in the line of the seed of the woman and Esau in the line of the seed of the serpent. As it says further on in **Romans 9:18**: “*So then [God] has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He wills*.” And so, we can infer from this that Canaan was one God hated. Canaan was one whom God chose to harden. And God, by His Spirit, made this known to Noah.
            2. Now, we are being given a window into God’s electing purposes here. He simply does not ordinarily tell us who He has chosen and who He has not chosen. That is His business. But the right response to the truth of election, from us, must never be That is not fair. That is the whole point of Romans 9-11. If it were about fairness, we would all be condemned to hell, because we are all sinners! The right response is Paul’s response at the end of Romans 11: “*Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and how inscrutable His ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been His counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to Him that He might be repaid?" For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be glory forever*.”
         3. But another thing to take into account here is that **Ham is Noah’s youngest son and Canaan is Ham’s youngest son**. And we see that in chapter 10:6 where Ham’s sons are listed. So, there is a type of symmetry here – the youngest son sinned, and the youngest son gets cursed. Or, to put it another way, an essential part of Ham’s sin was that he sinned *as a son*, and so, there is something fitting in that a son of Ham is punished.
            1. And there is a mercy even in this. **Psalm 103:10** says of the Lord that “*He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities*.” And God would have been entirely within His rights to curse Ham and *all* his sons for this sin. But He does not. He curses *only* Ham’s youngest son.
         4. And that brings us to the last reason for why Canaan is cursed, rather than Ham, which is that **this is prophecy**. What Noah said here is not just about what Ham did; there is also a forward-looking element here. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Noah declares the future.
            1. And if you know your Bibles, you will know that we will come across Canaan further on in the Bible. Where? It is the Promised Land. It is the place where God will bring the people of Israel after He rescues them from slavery in Egypt. And it is called Canaan because it was the home of the Canaanites – the descendants of the original Canaan. And if you look ahead to 10:15, you will see mention of peoples and nations that make up the Canaanites.

Two of them are **Sodom and Gomorrah**. And what are they most well known for? Great sin, including, especially, sexual immorality.

And other of the Canaanite peoples are included in the list of **the ‘ites** that God spoke with Abraham about. He said that one day He would give the land of all the ‘ites to the descendants of Abraham. Why? Because of their great iniquity. And their iniquity is well known from history as included every kind of deviant sexual immorality as well as every kind of idol worship, including the offering of newborn children in fire.

And the mention of **Gerar and Gaza** is a reference to those later known as the **Philistines**. And they too were notorious for their idol worship and drunkenness and sexual immorality.

* + - * 1. In other words, the sins of the father, Ham, continued through the line of Canaan. The Canaanites were notorious for gross sins, for many generations. And they were a constant source of enmity toward the Lord’s chosen people.
    1. But ultimately, as per Noah’s prophesy, they became the servants or slaves of Israel, when they were conquered by Joshua. So, when you get to those battles in Joshua, and in Kings and Chronicles, and read of tens and hundreds of thousands of Amorites and Hittites and Philistines, being killed by Israel, remember this prophecy. Do not think, aww, those poor, innocent people. They were a people of many generations of bloodshed and gross wickedness and idolatry. And it is all foreshadowed or introduced here in Genesis 9:25.

1. Well, in the second place, all that we have seen in relation to **the curse on Canaan** helps us also to understand **the Blessings upon Shem and Japheth** in verses 26-27: “*Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant*.”
   1. And **Shem** is the father of the Semitic people, or what we might call the Middle-Eastern and Eastern peoples. And most importantly, Shem is the father of Israel. Chapter 11 explains that from Shem, eventually, came Abraham. And from Abraham, eventually, came Jacob, and his twelve sons, who became the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. And from Israel, eventually, came the Lord Jesus Christ. So, Shem is the seed of the woman line. Shem is the line of promise and faith and salvation.
      1. And in relation to Shem, notice that it is not Shem himself who is blessed, but “*the Lord, the God of Shem*.” And this, again, emphasizes the sovereign and saving activity of God; it is ultimately the sovereign choice of Shem, by God, not Shem’s own actions, that bring about this blessing
         1. And this truth is stated, by God, in **Deuteronomy 7**. He said there, of Israel, “*The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that He swore to your fathers*.”
      2. And so, the rest of the Old Testament, beginning from Genesis 12, will be about God working out His salvation plan through the descendants of Shem, until, ultimately, Jesus Christ, son of Shem and Son of God, comes to save His people from their sins.
      3. And as per the last line of verse 26, Canaan’s descendants would at various times become the slaves or servants of the descendants of Shem. And we see the first example of this already in Genesis 14, where five Canaanite cities become vassal states of four Semitic kings. But this will repeat, often, throughout the Old Testament.

* 1. And that brings us to **Japheth**. And Japheth is the father of the Indo-European people. And in one of those curious and quaint Hebrew language word plays, Japheth means enlarge. So, Noah’s prophecy or request or prayer was that God would japheth Japheth, or enlarge Enlarge! And the Indo European people certainly did spread out to become many nations. And that brings us to the last part of Noah’s prophecy concerning Japheth. For Noah asked or declared that **Japheth might dwell in the tents of Shem**. And there are various historical and political situations where a coming together or a treaty or a friendship between descendants of Japheth and Shem may have bene the initial fulfilment of this prophecy. But ultimately, Noah’s prophecy here was a declaration that the descendants of Japheth would one day enter into spiritual blessings by virtue of association with one descendant of Shem in particular, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, I would like us to finish our time together today **by turning in our Bibles to Acts 10**. (p. 918)
     1. Chapter 10 is the account of the conversion of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. And being a Roman centurion means that Cornelius was a descendant of Japheth. And here he enters the tent of Shem, or becomes a member of the church, by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ.
     2. But it gets better. For if you turn back to chapter 9, we have the account of the conversion of Saul, a Jew. And that makes Saul a descendant of Shem. So, a son of Shem comes into the church, by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ.
     3. But wait! There’s more! For if you turn back to chapter 8, we have the account of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. And that makes him a descendant of Ham! So, a son of Ham comes into the tent of Shem, or becomes a member of the church, by virtue of faith in Jesus Christ.
     4. And so, the threefold division of humanity in the lines of Noah’s sons merge together in the early days of the Christian church. And this is, ultimately, what Noah’s prophecy looked forward to – the church of Christ, made up of people of every nation and tongue and tribe. And so, in Ephesians 2, for example, Paul talks about the Gentiles, or those not in the line of Israel, once being “*separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.*”  *But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility*.” And Paul then celebrates God’s mysterious and wonderful salvation plan. For he now understood that it was always God’s plan to unite the nations together in the one household of God, through faith in Jesus Christ. And a first indication of that plan is the prophecy of Noah here in our text.

And what this means, brothers and sisters, is that every single one of you today who has been saved, through faith in Christ, has come to dwell in the tents of Shem. And it should be our prayer that every member of our families, and many others besides, would also come to dwell in the tents of Shem. May the Lord make it so. Amen? Amen!