

Lessons From Characters In Old Testament

Shem, Ham, and Japheth

Lesson 5

1

INTRO:

- A. Shem, Ham, and Japheth were the three sons of Noah who along with their wives accompanied Noah and his wife in the ark during the great flood.
- B. Noah was 500 years old when he began to have children (**Genesis 5:32**)
 - 1. Their descendants went on to repopulate the world (**Genesis 9:18; 10:1**)
 - 2. If Noah had any other children, they are not mentioned in the Scriptures.
- C. All of the human race that exist today can trace their lineage back to one of these three brothers:
 - 1. The Israelites came from the line of Shem; in fact, the word Semite comes from the name of Shem.
 - a. Other descendants of Shem include the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Elamites, Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites.
 - 2. Ham's lineage produced the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Cushites, and the Egyptians.
 - 3. Japheth's lineage produced the Persians, Romans, Scythians, and Macedonians.
- D. If there is a preliminary lesson to the study of these three sons, it would have to be this:
 - 1. We tend to categorize people by their skin color, their language, or the color of their hair or eyes.
 - a. These superficial distinctions are the basis for our divisions of mankind.
 - b. We speak of the white race, the yellow race, the black race, and so forth.
 - 2. However it is here in this passage we should learn there is only one race, the human race, as we have seen from the beginning in the Scriptures,
 - a. But there are three families of mankind.
 - 3. Chapter 10 goes on to trace the spread of these families, headed by Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and we learn to which division of mankind each of us belongs.
 - 4. It's here in Chapter 9 we learn the distinctive contribution that each family group is intended to make to the human race.
 - a. Each contribution is different, unique, and it can be demonstrated in society that this is why God has divided the race into three families.
 - 5. This is something sociologists have lost sight of, and, therefore, many of their ideas and concepts about society are faulty.
 - 6. We need very much to return to an understanding of these passages.
- E. Normally, the way things are listed is very important in the Scriptures.
 - 1. In Verses 22 and 24 we are told that Ham was the youngest son of Noah. *"22 And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. 24 So Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done to him."*
 - 2. In the normal Hebrew listing of the names of a man's sons they would be given in chronological order, beginning with the oldest.
 - 3. However, in this particular case it seems Japheth was the oldest son, so the order should be, Japheth, Shem, Ham.
 - 4. Yet, the remarkable thing is that every time these three sons are referred to in Scripture together, it is always, *"Shem, Ham, and Japheth."*
 - 5. Notice also in verse 22 we are told that Ham was the father of Canaan.
 - a. By making mention of this we have, in a sense, the spotlight being turned upon a highly significant event in the life of Ham.
 - b. An incident which has impact upon the entire story found in the Old Testament.

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Lesson 5

2

- F. There is only one account recorded in the Scriptures which concerns Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (**Genesis 9:20-27**)
- I. **Not Necessarily Lessons But 4 Things To Know And Give Consideration To:**
- A. The drunkenness of Noah.
1. This event had to have taken place a considerable time after Noah and his family left the ark.
 2. There had to be time to plant a vineyard, to allow it to grow to produce fruit time to harvest the crop, to gather it, extract the juice from the grapes, time to allow it to ferment into wine, then for Noah to drink of the wine, become drunk.
 - a. It is difficult to know what to make of the drunkenness of Noah.
 - 1) Some suggest it means fermentation had never occurred before on the earth.
 - a) Therefore Noah would not know what was going to happen to him when he drank so much wine, and this explains his drunkenness.
 - b) Indeed, it may have been an act of innocence, rather than self-indulgence.
 - c) We read of no blame given to Noah even though, afterward, drunkenness is everywhere condemned and regarded as sin.
 3. Evidently, Noah felt warm because of the effect of the alcohol, took off his clothes, and fell asleep in his tent, or, as we say of a drunken person, "he passed out" and laid exposed in the tent.
- B. The strange act of Ham.
1. Just exactly what Ham did is very difficult to determine.
 - a. There are those who connect this episode with the account in Leviticus 18, where, under the Law, this phrase, "*to see the nakedness*" of an individual is a euphemism that refers to a sexual act.
 - b. There are others who feel that this involved a more perverted act on the part of Ham.
 - 1) This may have been true.
 - c. I'm in favor of taking the lesser of the two.
 2. It's clear Ham looked upon his father's nakedness.
 3. So the most likely answer to the question, "What did Ham do?" is that he looked upon his father's nakedness, either with lust or with delight and amusement.
 - a. He went and told his brothers, not in a spirit of being troubled or concerned, but possibly more with the attitude, "Hey, do you guys want to see something?"
 4. His flippancy toward his father's nakedness revealed two things about Ham:
 - a. He had no shame and grief concerning morals and,...
 - b. he disrespected his father, whose honor he was quick to trample on.

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Lesson 5

3

5. Maybe to better our understanding of this incident, let's recall the conditions that existed before the flood and what was the cause of the flood. (**Genesis 6:5,12**)
 - a. Noah's sons grew up in this kind of environment.
 - b. In view of all this, it could very well have been that Ham regarded this whole matter of his father's exposure very lightly.
5. There's a whole lot of the Ham's attitude in our society today and in far too many Christians in that there is no shame felt concerning nudity or near nudity.
 - a. It's treated very flippantly and lightly.
- C. The respect shown by Shem and Japheth.
 1. Whatever the extent of Ham's sin, Shem and Japheth refused to join him in dishonoring their father.
 - a. Instead, they walked into the tent backward without looking at Noah and lay a blanket over him to cover him (**v. 23**).
 2. Noah then blessed his other two sons while repeating Canaan's servitude to both Shem and Japheth (**vs. 26-27**).
- D. The cursing of Canaan, Noah's grandson, in place of Ham. (**vs. 25-27**)
 1. Why does Noah curse Canaan instead of Ham?
 - a. Could it be that Noah knew a great deal more about human nature than most people do today?
 - 1) Noah evidently recognized the link involving the influence of the parent - the influence of one generation upon another.
 - b. Another possibility is that Noah is acting under divine wisdom when he selects one out of the four sons of Ham to pronounce this curse.
 2. Whatever the reason, let us always remember God understands us better than we do ourselves.
 - a. No doubt the one area in which we consistently fail to understand is in recognizing the link between parents and children.
 - b. Whatever Ham did, he did because of his tolerance, yet in his son it will be greatly intensified.
 - c. There is much truth in the statement that whatever one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace.
 3. Therefore the curse rests upon Canaan regardless of our thinking.

II. Lessons Which Must Be Learned From All This:

- A. Even the most godly people are prone to sin.
 1. No matter how long we've been a Christian we never build up an immunity against sin. (**1 Corinthians 10:12** "*Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall*".)
 2. Noah was the most righteous man of his day, yet he got drunk and laid naked in his tent.
 - a. Past godliness doesn't guarantee future godliness.
 3. Let this also teach us that we are often the most vulnerable when the pressure is off.
 - a. When the pressure is off, our guard comes down.

Lessons From Characters In Old Testament
Shem, Ham, and Japheth
Lesson 5

4

- b. Those who live righteously before God know their own likelihood to sin and live in constant dependence upon the Lord.
- B. We all easily become calloused toward sin.
 - 1. When you read Genesis 9:20-27 what did you think?
 - a. “What’s the big deal? — Ham just looks on his father’s nakedness - The curse seems a bit extreme, not to mention unfair!”
 - b. But do we not see it is this attitude that reveals our own callousness toward sin?
 - 2. We are so used to moral filth dumped into our living rooms every night through the TV that we don’t even know it when we see it.
 - a. Even worse, we find humor in it when we should be horrified.
 - b. A man who paints houses said that after a few hours, he couldn’t smell the paint.
 - 1) Surrounded by the stench of sin, after a while we don’t notice it.
 - 3. The only way to grow more sensitive to sin is to spend more time in God’s Word and to avoid exposing ourselves needlessly to the evil around us (**Romans 16:19** “*For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*” **ESV**).
- C. Sins which don’t seem big at the time can have far-reaching consequences, not only for ourselves, but for our descendants.
- D. Be careful not to allow a family member’s sin to trigger sin in us.
- E. It is important to honor our parents, even if they’ve failed.
- F. Beware of the dangers of alcohol!

CONCLUSION:

- A. The bottom line for each of us is:
 - 1. Though we are prone to sin, we can obey the Lord and experience His blessing.
- B. Ask yourself, “Do I want God’s blessing in my life and for my children and grandchildren?”
 - 1. The way we experience God’s blessing is through obedience to Him.
- C. If we want God’s blessing for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren, we’ve got to get serious about obedience and get tough on our sin.