

Genesis 9:18-29

Last time we covered Gen 9:1-17 which discussed the Provisions and Sign of the Noahic Covenant. The Noahic Covenant is the third Covenant revealed so far in Genesis, the first two being the Edenic and the Adamic. We noted the following provisions,

1. Noah and his sons were to be fruitful and multiply. Noah now becomes like Adam in that all of mankind will descend from him, but it is also given to his sons, as Noah will have no more children after the flood, so all the increase in population must come from Noah's three sons and their wives (Gen 9:1, 9:7).
2. The second provision is that God will put the fear of man into the animal kingdom. This is necessary because the third provision of the covenant is that these animals are now eligible for food. Therefore, God gives them a fear of man to help their survival and to provide toil for man to procure meat, just as he has to toil to eat from the field (Gen 9:2).
3. The third provision is that man can now eat meat. God now states that in addition to plants, anything that lives can be used for food. Therefore man's authority over the animal kingdom now has a negative consequence for the animals, which is why the fear of man was placed in them. (Gen 9:3).
4. The fourth provision contains two similar commands: you shall not eat an animal that is still alive, and you shall not drink or consume its blood (Gen 9:4)
5. The fifth provision is the institution of capital punishment: and we noted this could be either God taking a life (as He did in the Flood), or man taking another man's life mediated through the establishment of government Gen 9:5-6.
6. The sixth provision is that God would never destroy life on earth or the earth itself again by water (Gen 9:8-11)

God then gave a sign to confirm all that He had promised (Gen 9:12-17). A sign is an outward symbol that signifies some underlying truth or message. The sign of the Noahic covenant is the rainbow (We will see for the Abrahamic Covenant the sign will be circumcision and for the Mosaic Covenant the sign will be the Sabbath). The Noahic covenant is still in effect today. In our area we are reminded of it each spring and summer when we see a rainbow appear in the sky. It is a visible reminder that God keeps his word.

Today we are going to pick up the narrative in vs 18 and will try to get through the rest of the chapter. We can call this section, from 9:18-29, the sin of Noah.

Vs 18, *The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.)*

Verse 18 opens with the three sons of Noah given in their birth order, who come out of the ark. Moses emphasizes the three sons because it will be from them that the world will repopulate. It is a clean start for mankind. Imagine the world they now enter. The flood is over. They are all alone. All God-rejecting men and women have been removed from the earth. The earth itself has been transformed. They face a new climate, a new topography, and an unknown but new future. But it is a hopeful one as I am sure

their expectation was to do everything they could to avoid a future scenario that would require God's drastic judgement again. Noah lived a righteous life and the idea was perhaps this family could create a much better world than the previous generations did. This is the utopian dream. One generation thinking they can always do better than the next. That we can create a society that is more noble, more virtuous, more just, more equitable, than the previous one. But one thing that didn't drown in the flood was sin. Sin walked out of that ark and into that new world. And as we shall see, it will have similar consequences in the chapters ahead. Moses specifically notes one of Ham's sons, Canaan, to connect to the later section of the chapter in which Canaan is cursed and whose descendants will become prominent from chapter 12 onward.

Vs 19, *These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.*

Moses now notes that from these three men and their wives will come all of humanity. They are like Adam and Eve in that they will become the source of all future peoples. The sons are again emphasized because Noah and his wife will have no more children. Moses also notes their descendants will be *scattered*, a prophetic word to what will unfold in chapter 11 at the Tower of Babel.

Vs 20, *Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded^[a] to plant a vineyard.*

Some of your translations say *Noah began to be a farmer, or began to cultivate*. This idea of starting something new (i.e. farming) is the best way to read this. In other words, Noah is going to do something post flood that was not his pre-flood occupation. We know for the 80 years or so prior to the flood Noah was a boat builder. Prior to that we don't know what he did. Now Noah decides to work the soil and he plants a vineyard. The Hebrew word is kerem which means garden or vineyard. The important thing to note is he began to grow something (presumably grapes) that could be fermented. And so he made some wine as verse 21 notes.

Vs 21, *When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent.*

To begin with, it is important to note that drinking wine is not wrong. Nor is it a sin to drink any other fermented drink. As 1 Tm 4:4 says, *for everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving*. Ps 104:14-15, *He makes grass grow for the cattle, and plants for people to cultivate—bringing forth food from the earth: ¹⁵ wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts*. Paul admonished Timothy to use a little wine for his stomach in 1 Tim 5:23, *Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses*.

On the other hand, Proverbs 20:1 says, *Wine is a mocker and beer a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise*. Prov 23, 29-35, *Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? ³⁰ Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. ³¹ Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! ³² In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. ³³ Your eyes will see strange sights, and your mind will imagine confusing things. ³⁴ You will be like one sleeping on the high seas,*

lying on top of the rigging. ³⁵ “They hit me,” you will say, “but I’m not hurt! They beat me, but I don’t feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?”

So wine has the capacity to bless and curse. And whether you will be blessed or cursed depends on how much you drink, and Noah has too much. Noah violates the cardinal rule of temperance—knowing what is too little or too much. And this sin leads to the other consequence which is he uncovers himself. There is a lot of speculation about what this means, but suffice it to say God thought it best not to reveal why he becomes naked. But the scriptures can give us a clue as when the phrase *uncover yourself* is used, it generally implies sexual sin. So, taking too much alcohol often (not always) leads to other sin.

So Noah gets drunk and ends up naked in his tent. There is another episode similar to this in Gen 19 where Lot’s two daughters get him drunk. The outcome of that folly led to the existence of the Ammonites and Moabites, who will be thorns in Israel’s side for years to come.

Here is the other thing. The hope of establishing a utopian age where the sinful character of the prior pre-flood civilization, would be overcome, is now shattered as Noah, their father, gets drunk, and uncovers himself, and is then followed by the sin of Ham in verse 22.

Vs 22, *Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside.*

Verse 22 gives us the response of Ham. He is again identified with Canaan who will receive Noah’s curse later in the chapter. Somehow Ham sees his father’s nakedness. The word *saw*, implies he saw with delight. Ham saw his father’s naked and drunk body, and delighted in it. He didn’t deal with it, rather he took pleasure in it, then told his brothers. Prov 17:9, *Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.* Prov 10:12, *Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.* 1 P 4:8, *Above all, love each other deeply, for love covers a multitude of sins.* Love covers a sin, yet here Ham is exposing the sin of his father. “Hey, dad is drunk and naked in the tent, go check him out.” But think about this as well. Sin is like a nuclear chain reaction. The sin of Noah triggered Ham’s sin, which somehow triggered Canaan’s sin which led to a sinful, evil, perverted people—the Canaanites.

Vs 23, *But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.*

Verse 23 records the response of Shem and Japheth once they hear this news. Notice their actions are in marked contrast to Ham. They reject Ham’s derision and exposure of their father. It makes you wonder why Ham did this in the first place. Did he have some hidden resentment? Anger? Or was it just a spontaneous evil act? Shem and Japheth now do everything to cover the sin of their father. It is like Gen 3 when God covered the sin of Adam and Eve, but here, instead of slaying an animal and taking a skin, they take a blanket, lay it across their shoulders, then walk backwards with their faces turned outward so they can’t see him, then drop the garment over their passed out father.

Vs 24-25, *When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵ he said, “Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.”*

Verse 24 records what happens when Noah sobers up and awakens from his drunken stupor. He realizes he is naked and is covered with a blanket or garment that is not his own. How did he find out who covered him? He obviously asked Shem or Japheth what happened. And once he learns how Ham treated him he then curses Ham's son, Canaan.

Verse 25 is one of the more controversial and difficult passages to interpret in the WOG. Why would Noah curse Ham's son when Ham exposed Noah's sin?

After reading a number of explanations, MacArthur's explanation is probably best. His is also echoed by Kaiser and Archer. MacArthur argues that since Ham was delivered from the judgement of the Flood, he must have been a believer (although this is not stated in the text) Note also verse 1, God blessed Noah and his sons. The question becomes, how could God both bless and curse? He doesn't; he either blesses or curses. It is his conviction that a believer cannot be cursed by God, only disciplined. However God can curse an unbeliever, therefore Noah couldn't curse his son Ham for this sin but he could prophetically curse Ham's fourth son, Canaan, whom MacArthur maintains is an unbeliever (in contrast to Ham's other three sons). MacArthur goes on to say that Canaan's descendants would embody this sin of "uncovered nakedness" (see their sins listed in Lev 18, 2 K 17, Gen 19 and 38).

The curse placed upon Canaan was that his descendants would be slaves to the descendants of Shem and Japheth, which is described in the book of Joshua.

Vs 26, *He also said, "Praise be to the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem.*

Noah now prophetically blesses Shem, who did the right thing by covering his father's shame and sin. Shem's line will produce Abraham and the nation of Israel, which under Joshua, will conquer and kill most of the Canaanites as the chosen instrument of God's judgement on them as noted in the book of Joshua.

MacArthur notes "the act of taking the *land of Canaan* was a just judgment of God on a cursed and wicked people. (Canaan) First nation to be identified as having been cursed by God. And so, when Israel heard this read, they knew they had a cursed ancestry, and that they were acting on the basis of divine judgment which had already been determined, giving them historical justification for being the instrument of judgment on Canaan.

Vs 27, *May God extend Japheth's^[b] territory; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth."*

Noah next prophetically blesses Japheth who also did the right thing by covering his father's sin. Note there are three parts to this blessing;

1. That the territory of Japheth be enlarged. We will learn from chapter 10 that Japheth is the progenitor of all the Indo—European peoples, whose territory indeed is expansive—from India to the western border of Europe. The descendants of Japheth were the colonizers of the world.
2. That Japheth will live in the tents of Shem. This means that for the most part, the peoples of Japheth and the peoples of Shem would get along. And that is historically true, as most of Israel's enemies were from countries that descended from Ham.

3. Canaan may be the slave of Japheth. We see this as early as Gen 14, when King Kedorlaomer takes over the five cities of the southern Jordan Valley. Kedorlaomer was a descendant of Japheth and the kings of the southern Jordan valley were all Canaanites.

Vs 28-29, *After the flood Noah lived 350 years. ²⁹Noah lived a total of 950 years, and then he died.*

Verses 28 and 29 record the length of Noah's life. Here is some perspective, Adam was the first man. He lived 930 years (Gen 5:3). We will note the year of his birth as year 1. Enoch, the seventh generation removed from Adam, was born when Adam was 622 years old. Enoch lived 365 years and was then taken up to heaven. Adam had died just 57 years prior. Just 69 years after Enoch was removed, Noah was born. The flood came when Noah was 600 yrs old. So in the lives of three men you almost span the time from the creation of man to the destruction of man. Noah lived another 350 years past the flood. He will see the events of chapter 10, the dispersion of his sons and their descendants, and the construction of the tower of Babel and the divine dispersion afterwards.

Just a few thoughts to end the chapter,

1. Beware Utopia! I think most every generation feels they will do a better job of creating a better society than the previous one. The question is how to define better. Better in terms of technology and the availability of goods and services, certainly yes; but better in terms of morality and an improvement in man's character, no. We are all sinners and man does not improve.
2. You are capable of any sin at any time. Noah is called a righteous man yet here he sins. Noah has a sin nature and so do we. Noah has just come through this incredible century; he receives a promise, he builds a boat, his life is a testimony to righteousness and he condemns an unbelieving generation. He goes through an incredible flood. He builds an altar afterwards and worships. He then plants a vineyard, gets drunk, and uncovers himself in some presumed sexual sin. He fails! It is so important to see this of ourselves. We are capable of any sin at any time. Don't ever think too much of yourself by saying I would never do X. Hopefully you never will, but we are entirely capable of any sin at any time. The other thing to ponder is why did he sin at this time? I suspect he was more vulnerable because the pressure was off.
3. Sin often sets off other sin. Noah's sin unmasked Ham's character which led to his sin, and presumably Canaan's sin. Sin leads to sin. It is indeed like a nuclear reaction that can quickly spread.
4. For this reason it is a good thing to quickly cover sin. Covering sin; the act of forgiving, then concealing, then forgetting and putting it away, interrupts the sin nuclear reaction. It may not stop the consequences, but it can stop further damage.