

Redemption Foretold

Christ Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, is such an important Person that the Bible anticipates Him from almost its very first page. The Bible's Prologue, the first 11 chapters of Genesis, looks forward to Christ and what He will do. It's almost as if the rest of the Bible is an expansion on those first 11 chapters.

The Fall narrative in Genesis 3, for example, tells us much about the theme of Scripture: that there's conflict between good and evil as well as the existence of embodied wickedness, the promise of a future resolution of that conflict, and the anticipation of someone who will overcome evil. There's also the theme of alienation, a postponement of judgment, and the supply of grace to deal with guilt. And more. The fall narrative in Chapter 4 builds on the idea of grace; there's a warning from God about sin, and there's permission to go on with life in the providential care of God instead of experiencing deserved condemnation. It highlights the binary nature of mankind, those who are wicked and those who follow God. The Flood narrative in Chapters 7 to 9 anticipates terrible punishment for sin as well as the gracious provision for the godly of salvation thru the judgment. The narrative in Chapter 11 reveals that God will have to "come down" to earth in order to enable a humanity contemptuous of God to fulfill God's intent for His creation.

But it's the narrative in Genesis 9 that so trenchantly anticipates God's plan to redeem mankind. It is amazingly proleptic of Christ and His work. For today's Sunday School lesson, let's explore the text and think about what it means.

The narrative in Genesis 9:18-27 is terse. Details of what happened and the story's significance aren't given, which may be why most preachers ignore the text. The story is basically how Noah's sons respond to Noah's nakedness. And that's all that matters, which is why the author doesn't supply more detail.

The story is this: Noah gets drunk and is in his tent naked. The youngest son, Ham, looks at his naked father and runs to tell his two brothers. The two older sons walk in backward so they can't see their father's nakedness and cover him. When Noah recovers from his stupor and realizes what happened, he curses the youngest son of his own youngest son. And he praises his oldest son's God. He also predicts future relationships between the sons.

The text incriminates Noah. He would have known the effects of alcohol (Matthew 24:38). If Noah isn't morally wrong, the story makes no sense. The sordid episode later in Genesis 19 involving Lot and his daughters reprises the immoral consequences of being drunk. But more important is his nakedness; it repeats the story of the Fall in Genesis 3. Noah "planted a garden," and the word "garden" is there to make us think back to Genesis 3. The original state of humans was naked. When they sinned against God, they *knew* they were naked and God had to clothe them to restore their dignity. So Noah is like another new human, a new "Adam," representing a new humanity in a new creation – but naked, shameful, without dignity.

The Flood has not changed the human heart (8:21). Drunken nudity is shameful (see Habakkuk 2:15-16). Noah is *not* the way back to a relationship with God. (It'll have to be someone else [as we know, Abraham].) In Genesis 9, we're back to the way things were at the beginning. This text is essentially another Fall narrative.

Shem and Japheth were morally obliged to cover their father's nakedness because it was so wrong – and they *knew* to do it. Ham should have done the same. Instead, what Ham did was reprehensible. He looked at his naked father and then went outside and publicly gloated over what he saw. He wasn't just disclosing his father's sin. He evidently was, in pride, using this knowledge to make himself foremost in the family by belittling his father. Sexuality may have been involved in some way, but the author doesn't disclose that and so we needn't think about it. The point is, exposing his father's shame, Ham mocked his father. He dishonored his father intensely.

But Shem showed mercy. By doing the exact opposite, Shem and Japheth repair the situation by concealing Noah's nudity; they thereby honored their father. Shem and Japheth are humble and show grace. Shem covered nakedness exactly like God did in the Garden (3:21). This indicates that he's a godly person.

Noah's curse and blessing in vv. 25-27 are also essential to the story. Because Noah's youngest son Ham dishonored him, Ham's youngest son Canaan will dishonor his father Ham; Canaan will repeat and amplify Ham's sin. (According to Chapter 10's Table of Nations, from the line of Ham will come Nimrod, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Egyptians, the Canaanites, and later the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Philistines. These are enemies of Israel.) In contrast to the prophecy regarding Ham, Noah praises Jehovah, Shem's God, whom Shem imitated by showing mercy. Shem has God's character and does what God does. Japheth's line is to benefit from Shem's line.

Now, let's think about the meaning of this narrative. There's a lot here. (1) It tells us the origin of Israel's enemies. God wasn't just being arbitrary in choosing Israel and rejecting these other nations. Those Gentile nations were depraved, following their ancestor Ham. It explains why God carried out *herem* (holy warfare) against the Canaanites in the Book of Joshua. Utterly depraved, they weren't fit to dwell in the Land where God himself also resided.

(2) It explains the reason for the 5th Commandment, to honor one's father and mother. Much of the Mosaic Law derives from the pathologies and sins that occurred in the era of the Book of Genesis. The Commandment includes mention of the Land because the Canaanites were not allowed to dwell in the Land because their ancestor Ham didn't honor his father; if the Israelites were to do the same, they wouldn't be allowed in the Land either.

(3) The story explains why we all are under judgment because of Adam's sin (as well as our own sins, of course). It's because the sins of a father become the sins of subsequent generations. Paul will pick up on this in the Letter to the Romans. (It's also a compelling reason to eschew theistic evolution.)

(4) It explains why David's sons, Amnon and Absalom, sinned so horribly after David's sins with Bathsheba and her husband. They were simply fulfilling the principle established in Genesis 9, that the sins of a father pass on, amplified, to subsequent generations. As the father is, so are his offspring. This same principle, as the father, so the son, applies to the Trinity: the Incarnate Son perfectly expresses the character of the Father. If we're adopted into a relationship with God by our union with Christ, our character likewise must express that of our heavenly Father.

(5) Noah's prophecy implies that all thru the coming era, spiritual principles will guide the history of humanity. Later in Genesis, Jacob follows Noah in prophesying the future of his sons. *The future is in view at every point in the Bible!*

(6) In Chapter 9, immediately after God acknowledges that the human heart is the same as before the Flood, we have this narrative about Noah and his sons to confirm God's observation. Humanity hasn't changed. But God has! From this point on, as evidenced by Shem's act of mercy, God's attitude will be grace.

But I suspect there's an even larger meaning to this story. Embedded in the Prologue to the Bible, the story must have tremendous significance to the theme of the whole Bible. I think its ultimate meaning is the following.

I see this story as a real, historical episode that also serves as an allegory. It anticipates the whole story of redemption that the Bible reveals. In this allegory, Noah is a 2nd Adam, representative of humanity. Shem represents the nation of Israel and, in particular, the ideal Israel who is embodied in the Person of Jesus, Israel's Messiah and King, the ultimate offspring of Shem. Japheth represents the Gentile nations who come into Shem's blessings and associate with Shem's God. Japheth's offspring are the Gentiles who respond to the Gospel and are united to Christ. Ham represents proud Satan, who seeks dominion over all humanity. And Canaan represents all those under Satan's control or authority who fulfill Satan's wickedness. ("Ye are of your father, the devil," John 8:44.)

It's hazardous to press this further, but I will. The cloak! How did Noah know what happened when he awoke? He saw Shem's cloak on him. Perhaps the cloak represents the blood of Christ, shed on the cross to cover our sins. And as Shem was careful not to look at his nude, disgraced father, Jesus did not partake of human sin; He did not become a sinner to save us. Some more theology here: Our sin nature persists in us, even though we're regenerated ("born again"). Throughout our lifetime, we're "covered" by the blood of Christ. It's not until our final and complete transformation that our sin nature is removed. Until that day, the Word of God, assimilated and obeyed, protects and sanctifies us.

Noah's sin was stupid, senseless, a failure. Humanity is hopelessly lost in senseless sin. Ham/Satan made the sin public, gloating over it, just as Satan wanted to do in the Book of Job. Satan proudly accuses us of sin before God. He seeks to make humanity disgraceful. Pagans, the offspring of Ham, represented by Canaan, express Satan's ugly character: pride, lust for power, contempt for others, hatred of humanity and self-exaltation. Shem/Jesus covered over humanity's sinfulness. He made it so that God can accept us. He covered the disgrace. Like Jesus, Shem expressed the essential facets of love, which are mercy and grace. We must do the same. Why is the forgiveness of offenses that come our way so important for us? Because it's how we, like Shem, in love cover the sins of others. Likewise by not gossiping.

What Christ accomplished for us is so great, so tremendous, so stupendous, and His Person is so beautiful, so perfectly glorious, that the Spirit of God was already revealing key aspects of Him and the salvation He made available back near the beginning of history. The whole Old Testament in one way or another (types and prophecies, for example) anticipates the Jewish Messiah. Jesus is the greatest reality there is. He's worthy of our all.