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GENESIS: BROKEN

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BLESSING AND SIN

²¹And when the LORD smelled the pleasing aroma, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.

Genesis 8:21 (ESV)

⁵The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

Genesis 6:5 (ESV)

¹⁸The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (*Ham was the father of Canaan.*) ¹⁹These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed.

Genesis 9:18–19 (ESV)

CONTEXT!

²⁰Noah began to be a man of the *soil*, and he planted a vineyard.

Genesis 9:20 (ESV)

The phrase “man of the soil” probably connotes more than simply “farmer” (which up until this point has been expressed by the Hebrew “worker of the soil,” cf. 2:5; 3:23; 4:2). The NIV’s “soil” translates the Hebrew *’adama*, which has been a significant term in these early chapters. It is the *’adama* that the man is made from (dust of the *’adama*), it is *’adama* that is cursed (3:17), and it is *’adama* to which people return when they die (3:19). The *’adama* is doomed and flooded, then God promises never to destroy it again. As a man of the *’adama*, Noah is mortal and must continue to struggle with the curse. At the same time, the *’adama* has survived, and Noah finds himself again on *terra firma*, with a second chance for humanity.¹

²³therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the *ground* from which he was taken.

Genesis 3:23 (ESV)

²¹He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. ²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, **saw** the NAKEDNESS OF HIS FATHER and **told** his two brothers outside.

Genesis 9:21-22 (ESV)

⁶So when the woman **saw** that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she **took** of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Genesis 3:6 (ESV)

In the Garden of Eden, there was an established food boundary, through which we can see that the sin of Eve was related to the blessing (which entailed provision of food). Eve was confronted with that food boundary and chose to cross it. She then persuaded Adam to cross it as well. A possible parallel in the account of Noah is that another blessing boundary is being crossed, this time regarding being fruitful and multiplying. Ham is being confronted by that boundary and tells his brothers of his intention to cross that boundary in some way. If so, Ham's sin is related to the "fruitfulness" part of the blessing just as Eve's sin was related to the food part of the blessing.²

⁷You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ⁸You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness.

Leviticus 18:7-8 (ESV)

Since the "nakedness of the father" can include the nakedness of the mother and since the nakedness of the father is a euphemism for coitus (throughout Lev. 18 and 20), is it possible that both Noah and his wife have become drunk¹⁶ and, falling into unconsciousness after intercourse, lie exposed in the tent? If one can infer from the act of telling his brothers that Ham may be hinting at (rather than making explicit suggestion, as in Gen. 19) impregnating his mother, the text would fit nicely within the literary patterning, for this is the sort of act that would constitute a transgression of reproduction boundaries.³

²³Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward, and they did not see their father's nakedness.

²⁴When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers." ²⁶He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant. ²⁷May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant."

²⁸After the flood Noah lived 350 years. ²⁹All the days of Noah were 950 years, and he died.

Genesis 9:18–29 (ESV)

For centuries the curse of Canaan (often referred to as “the curse of Ham”) was one of the principal passages used to justify slavery. It was claimed that Ham was the forefather of the African race and that their slavery was thereby biblically mandated because of the curse. Both elements in this contention are fatally flawed. (1) There are few families from the line of Ham that eventuate in dark-skinned peoples, and none from the line of Canaan. There is therefore no line of descent connecting Ham or the curse on Canaan to dark-skinned Africans. (2) A curse does not create a mandate. It is something for God to carry out, not humans (though he may use humans as his instruments). **I do not know anyone who cultivates weeds just so the curse on the ground will remain reality.** A final point would be found in the reminder that this is Noah’s curse, not God’s.⁴

But it is not necessary to conclude that the entire pronouncement is preserved by the author of Genesis. There may well have been a pronouncement made concerning Ham himself and others that addressed his sons other than Canaan. The author of Genesis is not obliged to record the whole but inevitably focuses on the part most pertinent to his purpose.⁵

The pronouncement places a curse on Canaan relative to his status within the family. He will be fruitful and multiply, but his descendants will be slaves. In similar ways the pronouncement on Adam and Eve placed a curse that impacted their status with regard to food. They would have food but would have to work hard to get it. The reason why the curse on Canaan is preserved is almost too obvious to mention. Both times Ham is mentioned by name, the text informs us that he is the father of Canaan. Within Genesis, we can conclude that the author is more interested in Canaan than he is in Ham. He implies that the Canaanites got off on the wrong foot from the beginning; thus, it is no surprise that by the time of Moses and his audience, they have earned the wrath and punishment of God. This concept in turn gives the Israelites at the time of Joshua a broader perspective about the Canaanites.⁶

According to the adage, those who do not learn from the mistakes of history are doomed to repeat them. Judging by the impact of those who decry history as “bunk” and of those who have simply had no opportunity to study its lessons, we must admit the truism’s accuracy. Power continues to corrupt leaders. Self-indulgence continues to bring decay in society. Greed continues to undermine economic growth. The sins of the fathers are visited on the children primarily because they repeat them. Recursion does not create such parallels; it highlights them in juxtaposition to one another.⁷

Cycles of sin are not only repeated across the span of centuries; they are also repeated in each person's habits and thoughts. Lodged in the network of our brains are developed patterns of behavior that repeatedly corrupt us. Whether these are habits of conceit and pride, of deception and façade, of unfaithful thoughts, of manipulation or patronization, of prejudice or revenge, of anger and hate, of perverse thoughts, or of selfish indulgence, we secretly cultivate them. We cling to them; we deny them to ourselves and hide them from others. Our own personal depravities thrive because we continue to feed the addictions of our minds and perpetuate the thoughts that our habits stimulate.

We are all trapped in cycles of sin, and the recursions that can be traced through our lives would horrify us if we allowed ourselves to be conscious of them.⁸

²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. ⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

⁸If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

⁹If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

1 John 1:5–10 (ESV)

¹ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 346). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

² Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 347). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

³ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 348). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁴ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (pp. 355–356). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁵ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 349). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁶ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 351). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁷ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 359). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

⁸ Walton, J. H. (2001). [Genesis](#) (p. 360). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.