

Chapter 11: Dispersal of the Nations

Genesis 9:18–10:32

At this point in Genesis, God has sworn that he will never again destroy the world with a Flood. There will be no more do-overs, so the people who exist will continue on, generation after generation, for as long as the earth remains—that is, until God destroys the world with fire to usher in a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet. 3:1–13). Between the first Flood of water and the final Flood of fire, God will never again hit the reset button on his creation. Instead, he will redeem creation in and through creation's curse, sin, and brokenness.

After the first Flood, the people who exist are extremely small in number, since God brought only eight people safely through the waters of judgment. From here, we need to see how the sons of Noah will reproduce into the heads of the clans, languages, and nations that will disperse to fill every land across the entire face of the earth. That, at least, is what we would expect to read as the very next story; however, we will not see that “table of nations” until Genesis 10. Between the record of the covenant with Noah and the first genealogies of the people groups descending from that first family, we discover a shocking, despicable story in Genesis 9:18–29. What are we to make of the patriarch Noah's becoming drunk and lying naked in his tent? Why is the sin of Ham so heinous, and why does Noah curse Canaan, the son of Ham? How does this influence the rest of the history recorded for us in the Bible from this point forward?

A New Garden; A New Fall (Gen. 9:18–23)

Because the story of Noah's drunken nakedness deals with salacious material, we should be careful to avoid letting our curiosities and imaginations control our reading of this text. If we allow ourselves to read this story as though it were something printed in a celebrity gossip magazine, then we will miss the actual purpose for which God inspired this text. The introduction of this passage, then, provides the first important boundary for understanding the meaning in this narrative: “The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the people of the whole earth were dispersed” (Gen. 9:18–19). These verses point our attention beyond the story of Noah's drunken nakedness to the genealogies in Genesis 10, which tell us about the dispersal of “the people of the whole earth,” and in particular, about the dispersal of the descendants of Canaan, the son of Ham, on the earth.

A New Garden

Contextually, this is the first story that we find after the full narrative of the Flood, which (as we have observed in this study) retells the creation story of Genesis 1. Through the Flood itself, God de-

created the heavens and the earth, returning creation to its original state of formlessness and emptiness (Gen. 1:2). Then, God re-established *form* to his creation by causing the waters to recede, returning the waters back to their boundaries away from dry land (Gen. 8:13), and swearing by a covenant oath never to allow the waters above the heavens to flood the earth again (Gen. 9:8–17). Finally, God commanded that the remnant of his creation whom he had preserved through the Flood should leave the ark to *fill* the earth again (Gen. 8:17; 9:1, 7) with his blessing (Gen. 9:1), and he commanded covenantal stipulations in Genesis 9:1–7 clearly modified and replaced the creational ordinances that God originally gave to his creation in Genesis 1:26–29.

Therefore, in re-establishing form to formlessness and refilling what was empty, Genesis 9:18–29 imitates the pattern we saw in Genesis 1. And, if the story of the Flood imitates Genesis 1, then we can understand Genesis 9:18–29 as following the pattern set out in Genesis 2–3. Here, we will discover a new Garden with a new Adam, and a new Fall with a subsequent new curse and a new blessing. This time, however, the story does not hold out the potential for sinless flourishing and joy in the garden of Eden; instead, the story is written in a minor key that immediately reflects the existence of human depravity that Yahweh acknowledged in Genesis 8:21.

We hear two hints that something is not right in Genesis 9:20: “Noah began to be a man of the ground [ESV: soil], and he planted a vineyard.” First, the word “began” occurs three times in Genesis 9–11: (1) here, when Noah “*began* to be a man of the ground,” (2) in Genesis 10:8, when Nimrod “*began* to be a mighty man on the earth,” and (3) in Genesis 11:6, when Yahweh suggests that building the tower of Babel “is only the *beginning* of what they will do.” Allen Ross writes, “The use of the same verb (*hālal*) in these three passages provides an ominous connection.”² These are new beginnings, but not good beginnings.

Second, the narrative describes Noah as a “man of the ground,” a very similar description to what we read about Cain, who was a “worker of the ground” (Gen. 4:2). We observed in our study of Genesis 4:1–16 that Cain’s being a “worker of the ground” linked him to the curse that had been put on the ground (Gen. 3:17, 23). This time around, Yahweh has further cursed the ground through a Flood, but he has also sworn that he “will never again curse the ground because of man” (Gen. 8:21). If the line about Cain signaled the one-sided wickedness of Cain as the offspring of the serpent, then this line about Noah is a little more complex. Noah clearly sins through his drunken nakedness, and he cultivates his wine from working the ground. Noah is not, however, a reprobate like Cain. His sin is associated with the curse of the ground, but he is also a man who has found grace in the eyes of Yahweh (Gen. 6:8).

These two sides of Noah help us reconcile the Noah we see in Genesis 9:21, drunk and naked in his tent, with the Noah we see in Genesis 6:9, “a righteous man, blameless in his generation. Noah walked with God.” Noah sins through drunkenness (a result of beginning to be a “man of the ground” who cultivates grapes for wine), but that does not mean that he has completely fallen away from the grace which he had found in the eyes of Yahweh (Gen. 6:8).³ Noah is a classic example of what Martin Luther called *simul justus et peccator*, a Latin phrase that means, “simultaneously justified and a sinner.” After Noah, we will see the same pattern of grievous sin in other patriarchs and leaders too, especially in Abraham, Jacob, and Moses. If we are ever tempted to whitewash the lives of these saints, the text of the Bible stubbornly refuses to let us do so; they, like us, continue to struggle in sin even after coming to know God.

A New Adam

More than comparing Noah with Cain, the primary comparison the narrative makes here is to present Noah as a new Adam on the earth, which the narrator accomplishes through at least seven points of similarity.⁴ First, Genesis 9:20 tells us that Noah “planted” (נִטַּע; *wayyitta*) a vineyard, just as Yahweh “planted” (נִטַּע; *wayyitta*) a garden in Eden (Gen. 2:8). But, lest we think that Noah will now enjoy a new garden of Eden, the next verse brings us crashing down to the dismal reality of life in a fallen world: “He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.” This is the second point of similarity, since, as Sailhamer observes, “The outcome is remarkably similar to the outcome of the story of the Garden of Eden. Noah ate of the fruit of his orchard and became naked.”⁵ Third, Kenneth Mathews points out that the phrase the ESV translates as “of the wine” (possibly also “some of the wine” or “from the wine”) might allude to Genesis 3:12, where “Adam feebly excuses himself” for eating only “some of the fruit,” a phrase that uses the same construction that we find here.⁶

The fourth and fifth points of similarity compare the actions of Ham in Genesis 9:22 with the actions of Eve: “And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.” The fourth point of similarity, then, comes in the way that Ham’s sin comes when he “saw” the nakedness of his father, just as Eve “saw” that the tree was good for food (Gen. 3:6).⁷ Fifth, just as Eve “gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate” (Gen. 3:6), so also Ham “told his two brothers outside,” apparently in an attempt to entice them to enter into his sin too.⁸ Sixth, when Noah awakes, we read that he “knew” what Ham had done, just as the eyes of Adam and Eve were opened so that they “knew” that they were naked” (Gen. 3:7). Seventh, as we will see when we examine the curse given to Canaan, the son of Ham, the sin of Noah and Ham will affect “the generations of sons and daughters to follow,” just as in the sin of Adam and Eve affected their descendants after them.⁹

These repetitions demonstrate and illustrate the doctrine of original sin. Although Noah and his family represent a new beginning, with a new Adam and a new garden, humankind has not escaped the sins of their forefather, Adam. Even the repetition of sin that arises through the forbidden consumption of fruit (this time, the *over*-indulgence in wine rather than the forbidden consumption of a fruit) and the repetition of sinning through sight underscores how closely these sins are tied to the Fall of Adam and Eve. Along with Noah and his family, the entire human race has not only inherited the judgments of guilt and death from Adam, but we have also inherited a disposition toward sin that causes us to walk in those same sins. All of us died “in Adam” (1 Cor. 15:22), but all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23).

A New Fall

What, then, actually happened here? To start, we should observe that the text does not clearly tell us that Noah’s drunkenness was sinful. Does the Bible sweep Noah’s sin under the rug by refocusing attention on the sin of Ham? Not at all. Biblical narratives often do not explicitly label an action as sin, especially when the action is clearly sinful. In fact, the biblical narratives often describe sins as briefly and as minimalistically as possible, whereas modern writers are more prone to luxuriate in every detail of a sin. Remember, the first sin in Genesis 3:6 is recorded in only eight Hebrew words. So, rather than downplaying what Noah has done, the sheer brevity of the description of Noah’s

action is a clue that helps us classify Noah's drunkenness as sin.¹⁰ More than that, the rest of the Bible (and especially the story of Lot's drunken degradation; Gen. 19:30–38) teaches that while God does indeed give wine as a gift (Ps. 104:15), drunkenness is a serious sin.¹¹ It is not the use of alcohol that constitutes sin, but rather its *misuse*.

But what exactly does Ham do to receive such a strong rebuke? Biblical scholars have long debated the nature of Ham's sin, since Ham's sin also receives only a brief description. Furthermore, it seems odd for Noah to curse Ham's son Canaan if Ham only "saw" Noah naked and told his brothers about it (Gen. 9:22). Allen Ross even points out that the "garment" Shem and Japheth use to cover their father has a definite article in the Hebrew ("*the* garment"), giving "the impression that Ham completed Noah's uncovering by bringing the garment out to his brothers."¹² Based on the vague language, some have suggested that Ham sinned sexually, since the language of "uncovering the nakedness" of someone is sometimes a biblical euphemism for sexual relations (cf. Lev. 18). Even if this were the case, it should be noted that the biblical euphemism for "uncovering the nakedness" of one's father does not refer to sexual relations with the father, but with the father's *wife* (Lev. 18:7–8). Regardless, this interpretation is unlikely, since the text of Genesis 9 seems to avoid using the actual euphemism "uncovered the nakedness of," and we only read that Ham "saw the nakedness of his father."

Still, to "see" the nakedness of Noah would have been a very serious thing, which the narrative communicates in part through the great care taken to describe how Shem and Japheth went out of their way not only to cover their father, but to avoid seeing his nakedness in the process (Gen. 9:23). Allen Ross explains the significance of Ham's sin this way:

There is thus no clear evidence that Ham actually did anything other than see the nakedness of his father. To Noah, however, such an act was serious enough to prompt the oracle on Ham's descendants (who would be openly guilty in their customs of what many suspect Ham of doing). It is difficult for people living in the modern world to understand and appreciate the modesty and discretion of privacy called for in ancient morality. Nakedness in the Old Testament was from the beginning a thing of shame for fallen humankind. To Adam and Eve as sinners, the state of nakedness was both undignified and vulnerable. Their covering of their nakedness was a sound instinct, for it provided a boundary for fallen human relations. To be exposed meant to be unprotected; to see someone uncovered was to bring dishonor and to gain advantage for potential exploitation.¹³

While this may seem a bit strange to us at first, modern society has a strong (but tragic) parallel that illustrates how profoundly nakedness and exploitation are still linked. With the rise of video conferencing, digital photography, and smartphones, teenagers can share nude images of themselves with other people far more easily than in the past. Tragically, those images can in turn be shared easily with still more people as well, humiliating the subject of the images. Horrifically, multiple teenagers have committed suicide after their nude photographs have escaped their own control.¹⁴ Simply seeing someone's nakedness continues to be an exploitative act.

A New Curse

In response, Noah awakes, discovers what his son Ham has done to him, and pronounces a curse

and a blessing:

When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.” He also said, “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.” (Gen. 9:24–27)

In the context of the unfolding story of the Bible, Noah’s prophetic oracle plays a crucial role; however, these words have also been misunderstood and misapplied toward grievously sinful ends. Furthermore, these words are important, since they are not only the *last* words we read from Noah before his death at 950 years of age (Gen. 9:28–29), but these are the *only* words we read from Noah, who is silent throughout the entire Flood narrative up to this point. We need, then, to study these verses very carefully.

To begin, we cannot overstate the significance of the fact that Noah curses Ham’s son Canaan, and not Ham himself. This is important, because at least one of Ham’s sons (Egypt; Gen. 10:6) becomes the eponymous ancestor of an African nation. From this, some in the past defended the enslavement of Africans as though Noah’s words were pronounced over all the ancestors of Ham, calling this passage the “curse of Ham.” This interpretation blatantly ignores what the text actually says in favor of what slave owners wanted it to say so that they could justify their sin. Noah, however, deliberately curses only Canaan, and not all of the descendants of Ham.¹⁵

Instead, this curse is specifically prophesying the subjugation of the Canaanites. Toward this end, we should remember that Canaan was mentioned at the outset of this passage in Genesis 9:18, when we read the parenthetical comment that “Ham was the father of Canaan,” and then again in Genesis 9:22, when Ham is again identified as the father of Canaan. These oddly frequent reminders that Ham is indeed the father of Canaan should clue us into the fact that the narrator wants us to associate what Ham does here not with all of Ham’s offspring, but exclusively with Canaan—and not only with the man Canaan, but with all of the offspring of Canaan, the Canaanites.¹⁶ Kenneth Mathews explains, “Lying behind this is the ancient concept of corporate personality. Because of this unity of father-son, the character of the father is anticipated in the deeds of the sons.”¹⁷ Ham’s sin against the nakedness of his father sets the pattern for what the Israelites would have recognized as the habitual practices of the Canaanites (cf. Lev. 18:2–6).¹⁸ As we mentioned above, Ham’s sin is connected generationally with his descendants through the line of Canaan, much in the same way that Adam’s sin is connected generationally with the whole human race.

This story, then, helps form the backdrop for why God expelled the Canaanites out of the land of Canaan, giving that land instead to the offspring of Abraham. God gave the Canaanites centuries to repent of the sins of their forefather, Ham, but they refused to do so until their sin reached a tipping point (Gen. 15:16). The message to the Israelites preparing to enter into the Promised Land is clear: from the very beginning (that is, the *new* beginning in the days of Noah immediately after the Flood), the Canaanites have followed unrepentantly in the wicked ways of their forefather, Ham, and Yahweh can no longer tolerate their evil. Yahweh is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, but he will by no means clear the guilty (Ex. 34:6–7).

A New Promise

Intriguingly, the blessing Noah pronounces regarding Shem is not a blessing *for* Shem, but a blessing for Shem's covenant God, Yahweh: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant" (Gen. 9:26). Indeed, if Shem's God is Yahweh, then to bless Yahweh is to bless Shem along with Yahweh.¹⁹ Shem, then, does not receive his blessing directly, but only through his relationship with Yahweh.

Additionally, Japheth receives a blessing for playing a part of covering Noah in the tent along with Shem, although Japheth's blessing is secondary and dependent upon Shem: "May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant" (Gen. 9:27). Just as Shem did not receive his blessing directly, neither does Japheth. Instead, Japheth's blessing will come through being enlarged by dwelling in the tents of Shem. So, while Shem is blessed through his relationship with Yahweh, Japheth will be blessed through his relationship with Shem.

This curious oracle of blessing will make sense only a few chapters later in Genesis, when a descendant of Shem named Abram will receive a remarkable promise from Yahweh: "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The blessing of Shem will come through the relationship of Abram to Yahweh, and the blessing for all the families of the earth come through the relationship of the families of the earth to the offspring of Abram. Ultimately, this promise finds its fulfillment in the true offspring of Abraham, Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16), so that through faith in Christ, all the families of earth can inherit the blessing of Abraham (Gal. 3:9, 29), fulfilling the (indirect) blessing promised to Shem. Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem, and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

The Sons of Ham and Japheth (Gen. 9:24–10:20)

While the next section of Scripture opens with another "these are the generations of" statement, Genesis 10 picks up where Genesis 9:18–29 left off. In many ways, we might look at Genesis 10 as the beginning of the rest of the story, since this chapter gives us the origins of the nations that "spread abroad on the earth after the flood" (Gen. 10:32) as "the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth" (Gen. 10:1). This chapter is complex, but highly organized, to shape these genealogies into a pattern of 70 nations that represent all of humanity after the Flood.²⁰

This chapter is difficult for modern readers, but Allen Ross helpfully clarifies the main themes that we should see as we read here:

Perhaps the most important topics that could be drawn from a study of this passage would be (1) the human race is united by virtue of its beginnings from one family—it is really one family; (2) the human race is hopelessly divided by language, race, territory, and politics, all of which raise the question of the cause for such division; and (3) the divided nations all stand in some relation to the divine plan for blessing and cursing, as witnessed by the oracle of Noah and the deliberate emphases within the table.²¹

In our own study, we will look at the big picture of this chapter rather than zooming in to explore each person mentioned in these genealogies individually. To do this, we will study the genealogies

of Ham and Japheth together (Gen. 10:1–20), and then we will turn to the genealogy of Shem afterward.

The Sons of Japheth

The sons of Japheth that we read about in Genesis 10:2–5 make up the shortest section of this chapter. This makes sense in light of the secondary emphasis given to Japheth in the oracle of blessing that Noah pronounced. Japheth is neither the object of the curse nor the primary recipient of the blessing (Gen. 9:25–27), so the narrator gives priority to the sons of Shem and the sons of Ham in this chapter; however, we cannot ignore Japheth altogether. Significantly, Japheth's descendants are identified as “the coastland peoples” (Gen. 10:5). Later, the prophet Isaiah will have something of a fascination with the way in which the Holy One of Israel and the Servant will call the coastland peoples back to the knowledge of the living God (Isa. 11:11; 20:6; 41:1, 5; 42:4, 10, 12, 15; 49:1; 51:5; 59:18; 60:9; 66:19). Ultimately, these coastland peoples represent many of the Gentiles who will be blessed in the tents of Shem through faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and this promise may inform us as to why Jesus lived in “the way of the sea...Galilee of the Gentiles” (Matt. 4:12–16; cf. Isa. 9:1–2) and went out of his way to minister in the coastland cities of Tyre and Sidon (Matt. 15:21–28) during his earthly ministry. Jesus, the offspring of Shem, sought not only to bless the people of Israel, but the offspring of Japheth as well.

The Sons of Ham

There are three ominous elements in the genealogy of the sons of Ham (Gen. 10:6–20) that we must recognize. First, one of Ham's sons is Egypt (Gen. 10:6), the eponymous ancestor of the nation that would become the first major enemy of God's people in the days after Joseph died (Ex. 1:8). While Noah's oracle of cursing and perpetual servitude was pronounced only against Egypt's brother, Canaan, we nevertheless see a shadow cast across the entire family of Ham, including Egypt. As noted earlier, this does not in any way justify African slavery, which is a curiously modern reading of this passage. Still, this passage sets up some of the major players in the coming conflicts in the Bible.

Second, Cush (the son of Ham and brother of Egypt and Canaan; Gen. 10:6) begets a son named Nimrod who “began to be a mighty man on the earth” (Gen. 10:8). The Bible does not tell us the meaning of Nimrod's name, but many scholars translate it as “We shall rebel,” which may hint at the spiritual nature of this man.²² Even if his name does not carry that meaning, the rest of what we read about Nimrod tells us everything that we need to know to discover that Nimrod is an extraordinarily evil man. He is a “mighty man,” a term reminiscent of the “mighty men” of the days before the Flood (Gen. 6:4).²³ Additionally, Nimrod builds his kingdom in the land of Shinar, which includes the cities of Babel (Gen. 10:10), a city of great wickedness in rebellion from Genesis 11:1–9 and throughout the rest of the Bible.²⁴ Then, if founding Babel weren't enough, Nimrod also builds Nineveh, the capital of Assyria (Gen. 10:11), which eventually becomes another great enemy of the people of God (e.g., 2 Kgs. 17; Isa. 36–37).

Third, the offspring of Canaan in Genesis 10:15–19 gives birth to five of the seven major nations who inhabit the land of Canaan when the people of Israel enter into the land under the leadership of Joshua: Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, and the Canaanites (cf. Deut. 7:1; Josh. 3:10). In the shadow of the curse oracle pronounced against Canaan, the text of Genesis is setting out from the

beginning the wicked nations whom God's people will eventually drive out of the land of Canaan.

The Sons of Shem (Gen. 10:21–32)

Finally, we come to the genealogy of the sons of Shem in Genesis 10:21–31. This genealogy is important for a variety of reasons, but we will encounter it again in Genesis 11:10–26 when we look at the “generations of” Shem specifically. Here in Genesis 10, this genealogy fills out the “generations of” the sons of Noah (Gen. 10:1), including Ham and Japheth in addition to Shem. Since Shem is the primary (if not direct) recipient of the oracle of blessing in Genesis 9:26–27, then Shem's genealogy bears repeating twice within a couple of chapters.²⁵ Two points are worthy of our attention in this genealogy.

First, the Shemites—more commonly called the *Semites*—include the people of Eber (עֵבֶר; *ēber*; Gen. 10:21, 25). Although not entirely transparent in English, the name Eber becomes the source name for the term “Hebrew” (*‘ibri*).²⁶ But, the “Hebrew” people are not the children of Joktan, the son of Eber, but rather the children of Joktan's brother, Peleg (Gen. 10:25). We will read the rest of the genealogy of the Hebrew people in Genesis 11, when we read the genealogy from Shem to Peleg all the way through Abram, the father of the nation of Israel (Gen. 11:10–26; 12:1–3). It is not surprising, then, that biblical interpreters throughout church history saw Shem as a messianic figure, the one through whom the promised blessing of Genesis 3:15 would come into the world.²⁷

Second, we should perhaps note a contrast between the sons of Shem listed here and the sons of Ham listed earlier in the chapter. The sons of Ham featured fascinating people, especially Nimrod, the mighty man who founded an empire that included Babel in Shinar and Nineveh in Assyria. Of the sons of Shem, though, we don't read anything of much interest here, despite the fact that they are the heirs of the blessing of Noah. Instead, we just see one generation after another begetting the generation to succeed them, and to spread out over the earth. In many ways, this contrast is reminiscent of contrast between the genealogy of Cain, with exciting cultural and technological advances (Gen. 4:17–24), and between the genealogy of the line of Seth (Gen. 5:1–32) that culminated in Noah (Gen. 5:28–32), where the only contribution of note was true worship (Gen. 4:26).

In part, this helps us to see the content of Genesis 4–5 mirrored here in Genesis 10, much the way we saw the creation story of Genesis 1 mirrored in the story of the de-creation of the Flood in Genesis 6:1–9:17, and then the Fall from paradise of Genesis 2–3 mirrored in drunkenness of Noah and the exploitation of Ham in Genesis 9:18–29. The narrative of Genesis, then, has come full circle, and, since God has sworn never to destroy the world again with a Flood (Gen. 8:20–9:17), the narrative will move forward, rather than looping in a cycle, from this point on.

But from another angle, there is a wonderfully practical insight that we can glean from this. Namely, the long passage of time reflected in these many generations that we read about here seem brief on the page, but represent centuries of real time. In our own lives, we may be tempted to despair, thinking that God has forgotten the promises he made to us, but these passages remind us that God was always faithful to keep the promises he had given through the oracle of Noah. Time continues on, year after year, decade after decade, generation after generation, and century after century. God is faithful to remember his promises, but he will do so on his own timeline, and not ours.

And importantly—he will be faithful not only to keep his promises of blessing to the line of Shem (the new representatives of the offspring of the woman), but also his promises of curse to the line of Canaan (the new representatives of the offspring of the serpent). In the same way, God will faithfully keep his promises that one day Jesus will return again, both to bring his people home, and to judge the wicked with fire. Time marches on as God continues to extend a call to repentance and faith before the great Judge of all the Earth will appear. Let us all heed then the words of the Apostle Peter:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. (2 Pet. 3:11–13)

For as long as the earth remains, let us wait for and hasten the coming of the day of God as we look in faith to his promise of a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Noah and his family unable to benefit from the fresh start God gives them? What does the doctrine of original sin teach us about the pervasiveness of sin, even among seemingly innocent children? How deep does the problem of our depravity go? Who can possibly deliver us from this body of sin and death that we inherited from Adam (Rom. 7:24)?
2. What does the Bible teach about alcohol? Why does Ham sin in *seeing* the nakedness of his father? Why do you think that the sins of drunkenness and sexual exploitation often go together? What role does alcohol play in your life? What role does sexual exploitation through *seeing* forbidden nakedness (e.g., pornography) play in your life? Where do you need to repent?
3. What does the curse against Canaan set up the coming judgment of God against the Canaanites? Why does God judge and expel the Canaanites from the land of Canaan (cf. Gen. 15:16; Deut. 7:1–5)? In what ways do the Canaanites inherit the sins of their forefather, Ham? What role does this passage play in justifying God’s righteous judgment against the Canaanites?
4. What do we learn from the promises that God makes to Shem? What do we learn to the promises that God makes to Japheth *through* Shem? Whom does God raise up from the line of Shem as the Redeemer of the world? How clearly do the themes of salvation through Jesus Christ for the Gentiles appear all the way back here in Genesis 9–10?

Notes

1. See ESV footnote. The ESV translates the verse in the main text this way: “Cush fathered Nimrod; he

was the first on earth to be a mighty man.”

2. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 213.

3. “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.” (Walton, *Genesis*, 346.)

4. John Sailhamer makes this comparison most clearly, and most of these points of similarity arise from *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 129. Where other commentators pointed out supplemental points of similarity, I have cited those points individually.

5. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 129.

6. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 417.

7. Walton, *Genesis*, 347.

8. Walton, *Genesis*, 347.

9. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 129.

10. “‘He drank some wine, became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.’ Brief and to the point, as often when Scripture disapproves of certain actions, this verse does not go into elaborate and lurid details.” (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 198.)

11. “The loss of decency and honour which marks this first biblical story of strong drink is severer still in the second, the degradation of Lot (19:30ff). It is not its only aspect (cf. Deut. 14:26; Ps. 104:15; Prov. 31:6, 7), but Proverbs 31:4, 5 is comment enough on the last passage, with the formidable support of Proverbs 23:29–35. The law was to make provision for vows forswearing its use, as a witness to primitive simplicity (Num. 6:1ff.), but such vows were a special vocation (see also Jer. 35; Luke 7:33f.).” (Kidner, *Genesis*, 110–11.)

12. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 215–16.

13. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 215.

14. For example, see Mike Celizic, “Her teen committed suicide over ‘sexting,’” March 6, 2009. <<http://www.today.com/parents/her-teen-committed-suicide-over-sexting-2D80555048>>. Associated Press, “Canadian teen found dead weeks after posting wrenching YouTube video detailing bullying,” October 12, 2012. <<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/10/12/canadian-teen-found-dead-weeks-after-posting-wrenching-youtube-video-detailing.html>>. Candace McCowan, “Girl, 15, commits suicide after friends share nude Snapchat video taken without permission,” June 8, 2016. <<http://wfla.com/2016/06/08/girl-15-commits-suicide-after-friends-share-nude-snapchat-video/>>. Accessed December 7, 2016.

15. For more, see Walton, *Genesis*, 355–56.

16. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 217.

17. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 421.

18. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 217.

19. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 218.

20. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 130.

21. Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 230.

22. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1*, 222.

23. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 450.

24. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 132. We will explore the dark history of Babylon in the storyline of the Bible more in the next chapter.

25. In fact, this genealogy is so important that we will encounter it again in 1 Chronicles 1:17–24 and Luke 3:34–36.

26. Kidner, *Genesis*, 116–17.

27. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11*, 424–25.