

The Three Families of Man

by Ray C. Stedman

In our present series we are attempting to understand society as it is revealed to us in the Scriptures. Perhaps no passage of the Scripture is more helpful and significant to aid us in this than the latter half of Chapter 9 of Genesis, the passage we will look at now. Here we shall learn the true divisions of mankind and also of the existence of a very dangerous trait that infects society, breaking out in sexual perversions from time to time and place to place. This will help us greatly in understanding what is happening in our own time.

In the eighteenth verse of Chapter 9 is a brief summary of the passage:

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 whole earth was peopled. {Gen 9:18-19 RSV}

We moderns tend to categorize people by their skin color, their language, or the color of their hair or eyes. These rather superficial distinctions are the basis for our division of mankind. We speak of the white race, the yellow race, the black race, and so forth. But here in this passage we shall learn that there is only one race, as we have seen from the beginning in the Scriptures, but there are three families of mankind. In Chapter 10 we will go on to trace the spread of these families, headed by Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and learn to which division of mankind each of us belongs. But here in

Chapter 9 we learn the distinctive contribution that each family group is intended to make to the human race. Each contribution is different, unique, and it can be demonstrated in society that this is why God has divided the race into three families. This is a secret that sociologists have largely lost sight of, and, therefore, many of their ideas and concepts about society are faulty. We need very much to return to an understanding of this passage.

These divisions have been already hinted at in the order of the names of the sons of Noah. It is remarkable how much significance Scripture hinges upon apparently trivial distinctions that it makes, and especially so in the matter of order. The way things are listed is often very important in the Scriptures. In Verse 24 we are told that Ham was the youngest son of Noah. In the normal Hebrew listing of the names of a man's sons they would be given in chronological order, beginning with the eldest. It seems likely that Japheth was the oldest son, so the order ought to be, Japheth, Shem, Ham. But the remarkable thing is that every time these three sons are referred to in Scripture together, it is always, "Shem, Ham, and Japheth." It is important to notice that in Scripture this order is invariably found: "Shem, Ham, and Japheth." The explanation is found in the prophecy that is given a little further on in this chapter.

Notice also in these opening verses of the passage that we are told a specific thing about Ham – that he was the father of Canaan. This is Scripture's way of turning the spotlight upon a highly

significant episode in the life of Ham, an incident which has impact upon society even yet to this day.

It is essential to the understanding of society that we explore and discover what is involved in this incident recorded for us:

Noah was the first tiller of the soil. He planted a vineyard; and he drank of the wine, and became drunk, and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it upon both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said,

**“Cursed be Canaan;
a slave of slaves shall he be to his
brothers.” {Gen 9:20-26 RSV}**

There are four things in this passage of great interest to us: *the drunkenness* of Noah, *the strange act* of Ham, Noah's son, *the filial respect* that is shown by Shem and Japheth, and *the cursing of Canaan*, Noah's grandson, in place of Ham, the son that was involved in this incident.

Notice that this is a condensed account of this event, as is evident by the fact that Noah's drunkenness occurred some considerable time after they had left the ark. There was time to plant a vineyard, time to allow it to grow to fruitbearing (anywhere from three to five years), time to harvest a crop, to gather it and extract the juice from the grapes, time to allow it to ferment into wine, and then, at last, Noah drinks of this wine, becomes drunk, and lies uncovered in his tent.

It is difficult to know what to make of the drunkenness of Noah. There have been some scholars who suggest that it means that fermentation had never occurred before on the earth; that the conditions that prevailed before the Flood were quite different from today, and that probably there had never been fermentation before. Therefore Noah would not know what was going to happen to him when he drank so much wine, and this explains his drunkenness.

Now, there may be something to this. It is impossible, however, to be dogmatic about it. It may have been an act of innocence, or of self-

indulgence. Certainly there is no blame expressed toward Noah in this account, even though, afterward, drunkenness is everywhere condemned in Scripture and regarded as sin.

Noah evidently felt warm because of the effect of the alcohol, took off his clothes and fell asleep in his tent, or, as we say of drunken persons, “he passed out” and lay exposed in the tent. Just exactly what his son did to him is also very difficult to determine. There are some Bible scholars who link this episode with the account in Leviticus 18, where, under the Law, this phrase, “to see the nakedness” of an individual is a euphemistic expression for a sexual act. There are some scholars who feel that this involved some homosexual activity on Ham's part. This may have been true. If we take the lesser implication, it is clear that Ham looked upon his father in his exposed condition, and obviously did so with a leering glance that had a sexual connotation to it. So whether or not there was outright homosexuality, or only latent, it is clear that some form of sexual perversion is present here, either in thought or in act.

In order to understand this incident we must recall the conditions that existed before the Flood and which produced the Flood. Recall that in Genesis 6 we are told that there occurred a demonic invasion of the human race very similar to what we see also in the New Testament in the days of our Lord. The result of this was a widespread outbreak of sexual perversion. Remember that in the New Testament, Jude says, in referring to this time, that it all began with a series of unnatural acts. It is linked also in Jude with the unnatural sexual life of Sodom and Gomorrah. Recall also that Shem, Ham, and Japheth grew up in this kind of an atmosphere, that Noah and his family were an island of righteousness in the midst of a sea of perversion that had possessed society before the Flood. Though Ham perhaps is no pervert himself, nevertheless it is clear from this account that he regarded this whole matter of the exposure of his father in a lurid way, and took it lightly. He was ready to take a lewd delight in joking about this episode, even with respect to his own father. This, of course, reflects how much impact the sexually distorted society in which these boys grow up had upon them at least upon Ham.

It is also noteworthy here that Shem and Japheth would have nothing to do with this. They did not respond to their brother's implications and

suggestiveness. They exemplify in action the verse in the New Testament, "Love covers a multitude of sins," {1 Pet 4:8 RSV}. Literally, they covered their father and refused to look upon his shame, thus they honored their father and won the approval and blessing of God.

But perhaps the strangest thing in this whole account is that, when Noah awoke and learned what had happened to him, what Ham had done, he does not curse Ham, but rather settles the curse upon Canaan, the youngest of Ham's four sons.

The question that leaps out as we read an account like this is: Why does Noah curse Canaan instead of Ham? We cannot take this as mere caprice on Noah's part. There is some reason for this. The discovery of that reason is an open door into further understanding of society. If we are right about what we believe is the answer here, it reveals that Noah knew a great deal more about human society than most people do today.

Noah evidently knew that sexual perversion is linked with parental influence. That is one of the things that psychology is telling us today. Psychologists, who have made a study of homosexuality, say that most homosexuals come from homes where there is a distorted parental influence. Usually a dominant mother and a weak father produces a homosexual son, or the opposite produces a homosexual daughter. In these days, when this perversion is widespread and generally accepted, we need to understand this.

As we saw in Genesis 6, there is a suggestion of an outright genetic link, an inheritance factor is involved. If this be the case, as I strongly suspect it is, then Noah knew that Ham's tolerance of perversion, his delight in it, would break out in an intensified form in at least one of his children. Thus, guided by divine wisdom, he unerringly selects the one boy of Ham's four sons in whom this perversion will find outlet and expression. So the curse is pronounced upon Canaan.

We must realize that the Bible understands us much better than we do ourselves. The one area in which we consistently fail to understand society is in recognizing the links between human beings, and especially between parents and children; the effect of one generation upon another. This the Bible views most realistically, therefore it is made clear here that Noah knows that, though in Ham this may not manifest itself in any more open way than a mere tolerance and acceptance of this sort of thing,

yet in his son it will be greatly intensified. Therefore the curse rests upon Canaan.

Now all this is proved in the book of Joshua (and also in First Kings) where we are told that the Canaanite tribes are all descendants of Canaan. They are listed for us in Genesis 10, Verse 15:

Canaan became the father of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Gargashites, the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and the Hamathites. {Gen 10:15-18a RSV}

You who are familiar with the Old Testament know how many times the names of these tribes appear throughout Old Testament history. These were the inhabitants of the land of Canaan when Israel came up out of Egypt. It was because of the moral turpitude of this people, who lived in sexually perverted ways and became a moral cancer upon society, that God gave command to the children of Israel to exterminate them when they came into the land. This bothers a great many people when they study the Old Testament. They ask, How can God order a whole people wiped out? Well, there was good reason for it. These people were a moral blight upon society, and it was necessary for them to be totally eliminated in order to preserve society from the deterioration and degradation that they represented. When Israel failed to do this, they became, as the curse of Canaan here suggests, "hewers of wood and carriers of water," a servant of servants to the people of Israel, as recorded in Joshua 9:23.

All this answers a very widespread distortion of this passage that has been accepted for many, many years which says that the curse fell on the Negro people. The mark of it was a black skin, and therefore they are destined to be servants among mankind. But the Canaanites, as far as we know, were not black-skinned people. The curse was wholly fulfilled in Joshua's day when these descendants of Canaan, morally perverted through this evil strain which had survived the Flood and now breaks out again in human history, were left alive by Israel. Thus there was loosed in society an evil element which has spread throughout the entire race since, and breaks out in sexual perversions from place to place. This is the biblical explanation for these things.

There is, however, a grain of truth in applying this passage to the Negro people. Most powerful lies gain their power from having at least a modicum of truth about them. It is true that the colored peoples of the earth are descendants of Ham, Hamitic people. They come in varying shades: the yellow of the Chinese, the brown of the Indians, the black of the Africans, and even including some that are white-skinned.

Now we must turn to the prophetic words uttered by Noah about his sons as to the destiny of their descendants.

He also said [notice how he deliberately sets this apart from what he said about Canaan],

**“Blessed by the Lord my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.
God enlarge Japheth,
and let him dwell in the tents of
Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”**

After the flood Noah lived three hundred and fifty years. All the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years; and he died. {Gen 9:26-28 RSV}

Here we have the three families of mankind. The family of Ham is represented by Canaan, although not limited to his descendants. In certain of the old versions, in these two verses referring to Canaan, the account reads, “Ham, the father of Canaan,” which is probably the more accurate rendering. Now this is a most important passage. We can hardly overrate its importance in understanding the world of our day. I can only touch upon it now but we will go further into it in looking at Chapter 10.

Notice that Shem is given religious primacy among mankind. The Semitic people, the descendants of Shem, were responsible under God to meet the spiritual needs of mankind. That is their role in humanity. It is most striking, isn't it, that the three great religions of earth, which can properly be called religions, all come from the Semitic family: Judaism, Mohammedanism, and Christianity. There is much distortion of truth in these, granted, but the sense of mission by the Semitic families of earth is very evident. This family includes the

Jews, the Arabs, certain ancient peoples, as well as other modern groups.

Japheth was promised enlargement. The Japhetic people are, in general, the peoples of India and Europe, the Indo-European stock, with which any demographer is familiar. It is largely from this family that we Americans come. It is most interesting that history has recorded their geographical enlargement. The entire Western hemisphere of our globe is settled by Japhetic peoples, and the Indians (Hindus) are of the same stock. But there is much to suggest in history that the enlargement that is promised here to Japheth is also intellectual. Historically, all the great philosophers are Japhetic. The Greeks, who began modern philosophy, are descendants of Japheth, as we will see in the very next chapter, also the Hindus. The Greeks and the Hindus are the two truly great philosophic races of earth.

Some of you may say, “Well, what about Confucius?” He was a Hamite, but Confucius was not a philosopher; he was a teacher of practical ethics. Anyone who studies him will realize how true this is.

There is a very astute Christian scholar, whose writings are privately distributed, who has been a great help to me in various fields of Bible study. His name is Dr. Arthur Custance, from Toronto, Ontario, to whom I am greatly indebted for some of these concepts. He takes the phrase, “let him [Japheth] dwell in the tents of Shem” as predictive of the Cross, when the spiritual guidance of humanity passed from the Jews to the Gentiles, i.e., to the Japhetic family. To Shem was given the primacy of religious teaching, but there comes a time when Japheth enters that field (“dwells in the tents of Shem”), and philosophy (which is essentially Japhetic) was married to theology. This has been the case since the dispersion of the Jews around the world.

There is much more we will say on this as we go on into Chapter 10, but let me speak briefly about Ham. Ham is given the role of a servant in relation to both of these other families of earth. But, notice carefully, not a servant in the sense of enslavement. That role was limited to the descendants of Canaan. “A slave of slaves,” is the Hebrew way of emphasizing, of intensifying a statement. Canaan was to be that, but not the rest of the sons of Ham. However, they were to fulfill a servant relationship, not in the sense of enslavement,

but as the practical technicians of humanity. If you study ancient history and technological achievements which were in many ways the equal of, or superior of, much that we have today, were founded and carried to a high technological proficiency by Hamitic people. This is the role in history given by God to the descendants of Ham. The Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Mayans, the Aztecs, all were Hamitic people. They were the great inventors of mankind.

It may come as a shock to some, who boast in Aryan superiority, and think of Americans as the most inventive people on the earth, to know that almost every basic invention can be traced to the Hamites, rather than to the Japhethites, which we represent. All that Japhetic people do is to develop the philosophy of science and apply technology, but the discovery of these are largely traceable to the Hamitic peoples of the earth.

Now, to bring this introduction of the subject to a conclusion, all of this is reflected most interestingly in the New Testament. We have, for instance, the so-called Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), which are very similar to one another and quite different from the Gospel of John. Yet Matthew, Mark, and Luke are not copies of one another but they represent differences of approach. It has often been pointed out that they are aimed at different types of people. The interesting thing is that, when you inquire who these people are, you find that they are Shem, Ham, and Japheth, in that order:

- Matthew is aimed at the Semitic people. It is the Gospel for the Jews, above all others.
- Mark is clearly the Gospel of the Servant. This is stressed by Bible teachers whenever they teach Mark; his Gospel is profoundly the presentation of the servant, the practical mind, the Hamitic mind.
- Luke is clearly aimed at the Greek, or the Japhetic mind.

It is also interesting that three groups are recorded in the New Testament as specifically coming to seek the Lord Jesus. They are the shepherds,

the wise men, and the Greeks. Here you have again the order: Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

- The shepherds were Israelites, Semitic.
- Most Bible scholars feel that the Magi, the wise men from the East, were really not from the East (that was a general term) but from Arabia, and represent the Hamitic peoples.
- The Greeks are clearly Japhethites.

So there again, always in the same order, we have Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Also, the gospel was first preached in this order:

- In the book of Acts we are told that, on the day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and said, "Ye men of Israel," and addressed the gospel to them.
- Then in the next section we find Philip called to leave a revival in Samaria and go down to preach to a single individual in the desert, who is a Hamite, an Ethiopian, the treasurer of Ethiopia.
- Then, a little bit later on, Peter is sent to the Japhethites, preaching the gospel to Cornelius, a centurion of Rome.

Furthermore, all three of these groups are represented at the crucifixion. Each branch of mankind took part in the crucifixion:

- The moral responsibility for it fell upon the Jews. It is they who said, "His blood be upon us and upon our children," {cf, Matt 27:25}.
- The physical burden of bearing the cross fell upon a Hamite, Simon of Cyrene, a stranger in Jerusalem who was impressed into the task of bearing the cross for our Lord on the Via Dolorosa.
- Finally, as you know, executive responsibility for the crucifixion rested with the Romans, who gave the official order for the death of our Lord.

Now, we shall see much more of this in Chapter 10, but I think this is enough to show how accurately the Bible previews history, and how it deals realistically with these matters. There are often hidden in these biblical passages amazing truths which, when we one begin to trace them, carry us into vast and exciting fields of discovery. We have looked at enough to confirm to us this fact: that the race, the whole race, is but the individual written large. There are three divisions of mankind, as there are three divisions in man, in you. To each of these divisions is given the responsibility for meeting one of the basic needs of man: spiritual, physical, and intellectual.

In each one of us these same three divisions are found:

- We each have a capacity to worship;
- We each have a capacity to reason; and
- Each has a capacity to create.

These are the things that distinguish us from the animals. This is the image of God in man. Each of them needs to be held in perfect balance. The world is in a state of confusion, uncertainty, and despair because the balance God intended has been left unfulfilled, so, in your individual life, you are in a state of confusion, despair, frustration, weakness, or whatever it may be, because you have neglected to fulfill the three-fold capacities of your own nature.

You can only do so as they are kept in perfect harmony, one with the other.

It is wrong to think of man as essentially spiritual. He is also intellectual and physical. It is wrong to think of him as being essentially physical, and to develop the athletic abilities to the neglect of the others; he is also spiritual and intellectual. The interesting thing is that, in the Bible, the intellectual is put last. If the order of Scripture obtains for the individual as well as for the race, the order within us is also Shem, Ham, and Japheth: First the spiritual, then the physical, then the intellectual.

In that order mankind finds its complete fulfillment. If we understand ourselves we will also understand the world around us. The glory of the gospel is that it addresses itself to mankind exactly on those terms. We find ourselves entering into fulfillment, into excitement, into a dramatic sense of being what we were intended to be, when we

open our lives to God through Jesus Christ, making that our first priority; then developing the physical life, taking care of physical needs, physical demands; and through these two working together, developing the intellect to an understanding of ourselves.

Surely we can echo these words of David in the eighth Psalm:

**O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth!
Thou whose glory above the heavens is chanted
by the mouth of babes and infants,
thou hast founded a bulwark because of thy foes,
to still the enemy and the avenger.
When I look at thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
the moon and the stars which thou hast established;
what is man that thou art mindful of him,
and the son of man that thou dost care for him?
Yet thou hast made him little less than God,
and dost crown him with glory and honor.
Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands;
thou hast put all things under his feet,
all sheep and oxen,
and also the beasts of the field,
the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
whatever passes along the paths of the sea.
O LORD, our Lord,
how majestic is thy name in all the earth! {Psa 8:1-9 RSV}**

Man is to fulfill that as he finds fulfillment in the Son of God.

Prayer:

Thank you again, our Father, for instruction from your word. The Word of God is given, we are told, to instruct us in righteousness. Now we pray that we may be open to this instruction and understand life and ourselves because of its revelation to us. Make us to realize how essential it is that we begin at the beginning. "The fear

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of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”
We pray therefore that we may bow before
you, our God, our Maker, our Redeemer,
our Friend, our Savior, and let our hearts

respond in love and gratitude to you who
desire to make us exactly what you in-
tended us to be. We pray in Christ’s name,
Amen.

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