

The Descendants of Ham and Modern Racism

A Point Harbor Fact Sheet

In the history of the New Testament church many people, even some Christian people, have used the Word of God to support their innate feelings of racism, bias or superiority. They use the time-worn method of pulling a Bible text out of its immediate context in seeking to support their agenda. As Christians, it behooves us to be Biblical, to be accurate, to be *Christian!* In order to accomplish this we need to let *God* have the last say, not our biases or our backgrounds.

During the era of slavery in both America and England, some pro-slavery folks tried to utilize Genesis chapter 9 as their “proof-text” that God was okay with slavery, because of the so called “curse of Ham”.

Genesis 9:18-27 ^{NIV}

The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the earth. Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father's nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." He also said, "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave."

Sad to say, this easily disprovable and radically unbiblical notion still persists in a few locales. What does the Word of God have to say about this subject?

Preliminary Considerations

*"It is important to remember that **true racism has its roots in the theory of evolution.** The Bible does not once recognize the existence of different races or even the very concept of "race" -- the latter is strictly a category of evolutionary biology!" --Henry M. Morris*

Something to notice: The first two great civilizations were Hamatic (Babylon & Egypt). If all of Ham's descendants were to be slaves and serfs... these folks missed out!

*"The sons of Canaan and Ham were not all black, though some were... **You will notice that as far as the literal terms of the Scriptures are concerned the curse is only on Canaan...** it is very likely that some of the elements of the curse would continue, at least for a time. **The Bible does not say 'forever' and, of course, you and I must not say 'forever'!**" --John R. Rice*

Why was Canaan, a son, singled out?

He may have been singled out in the providence of God, because when Moses was penning this history - years later - the traveling people of Israel were having stiff resistance from these descendants of Canaan, these Canaanites... and God may have been reminding them of their special selection!

Some people have even suggested that black skin coloration was a sign of the curse!

"Even apart from the miraculous changes [at the Tower of Babel] such characteristics could have developed quite rapidly, assuming that the different genetic factors (for skin color, stature and hair texture and the like) were present in the ancestral stock, and that isolation and selection pressures of some kind, whether climactic or social or others, operated in favor of certain characteristics of each tribe." -- Henry M. Morris

*"A question that keeps arising is this: Is the curse of Ham upon the dark races? It certainly is not. To think otherwise is absolutely absurd. The Scripture does not teach it. The coloration of the skin, the pigment that is in the epidermis of the human family, is there because of sunlight from the outside not because of sin from within. There is no curse placed upon Ham; the curse was upon Canaan his son.... Let me repeat that it hasn't anything to do with color -- it is not a curse of color put on part of the human race. That teaching has been one of the sad things said about the black man. **It is not fair to the black man and it is not fair to God -- because He didn't say it!**" -- J. Vernon McGee*

The Christian's Responsibility & Attitude

"Instead of oppressing those [supposed descendants of Ham], we ought to do everything in our power to make their way easier, and to remember that Christ died for them as well as for others, and seek to bring the gospel of our blessed Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." -- M. R. DeHaan

"It is a fearful abuse of God's Word, when men refer to the curse of Canaan in defense of slave-traffic... For...Canaan is not the same as Ham; [and] Canaan's servitude is the service of Shem, therefore of the Prince of Shem, that is, he becomes the servant of Christ, and in Christ is free..." -- Philip Schaff in Lange's Commentary

The Last Word... from THE Word

Eternal salvation - through faith in Jesus Christ - is available to men and women "from every nation and tribe and people and language" Rev. 7:9^{NLT}

"And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings... -Acts 17:26-27^{NKJV}

The Messiah has made things up between us so that we're now together on this... He tore down the wall we used to keep each other at a distance. -Ephesians 2:14^{MSG}

