

Our Covenant God – Part Twenty Four

Blessings and Cursings

Today is our last lesson on Noah. We are going to look at the topic of “blessing” and confront some controversial issues.

In the story of Noah, we have:

1. God blessing Noah and his sons.
2. Noah blessing God, Shem, and Japheth.
3. Noah cursing his grandson, Canaan, Ham’s son.

Noah had three sons: Shem, Ham, and Japheth. We don’t know when they were all born – in fact, some Bible teachers believe that they were triplets. It seems that Japheth was the oldest and was born when Noah was 500 years old; while Shem was possibly the youngest. Shem is usually named first, however, because it is from his bloodline that Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Israelites, and most importantly, Jesus, came. All three of Noah’s sons were married by the time of the Flood. Everyone alive on this Earth today descends from these three couples.

From a genetic point of view, Noah and his family certainly needed to possess the genetic makeup to produce all the different physical characteristics we see in people today. In order for them to produce descendants with light and dark extremes of skin colors, they were probably light brown. Ham, Wieland, and Batten go into detail on this subject in their book called *One Blood: The Biblical Answer To Racism*. There were no divisions of people into different groups until after the Flood when God confused the languages of the people at the Tower of Babel. Even then, the divisions were not made according to physical appearance, but by language. They scattered over the Earth in groups with those who spoke their language.

Bible teachers seem to agree that Caucasian / white people have descended from Japheth, while dark-skinned people descended from Ham, and Middle-Easterners descended from Shem. But these groupings could only have appeared a while after the Tower of Babel because only then would the gene pool have been restricted enough to produce specific so-called racial characteristics.

The Bible’s attitude towards racism is clear. In Acts 17:26, Stephen stated that every nation of men came from one blood. In Galatians 3:28, Paul says that there are no differences between people because if you are in Christ, you are one. Thus, we all come from one (Adam) and, no matter our physical or cultural differences, because of the Last Adam (Jesus) we are one.

I heard Bishop T.D. Jakes share one Sunday at church about his first book. It was called *Shades of Gray* and was about racism. He had already completed fourteen chapters when he visited South Africa for the very first time. I was privileged to hear him preach in Johannesburg, South Africa, while he was there. When he returned to the U.S.A. he destroyed his manuscript. *Shades of Gray* was never published. He explained that South Africa showed him that he was looking at the subject of racism through American eyes, because he thought that racism was about white against black and black against white. When he went to Africa, he saw that it was far more complex a matter because Zulu was against Xhosa and Venda was against Sotho. Each tribal group had enemies: black against black. Bishop Jakes was faced with the reality: that racism boils down to how it started from the beginning: Cain against Abel; brother against brother.

As a white South African, I was told that black people have no souls. That is how my own family justified racism. I grew up during apartheid, which was a racist government system of segregation where white people dominated black people. When I was sixteen years old I started to work with underprivileged black children from a township (segregated living area for black people) called Alexandra Township. They were the most beautiful children and I believe that they helped me grow as a person far more than I was ever able to help them. I could tell you stories of heart-breaking letters I got from one child in particular asking me why God hated her so much because if He loved her then He would have given her a white skin like mine. Today she has AIDS. Racism has destroyed so many lives that I have loved and the most shocking

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thing to me is that it was justified Biblically by people saying that God cursed Ham and black people come from Ham and therefore black people are thus cursed by God. That shouldn't really be so shocking, because—after all—the devil himself used Scripture even to tempt Jesus. But whenever the devil uses Scripture he has to distort it somehow.

Firstly, God never cursed any of Noah's sons. It was Noah himself who cursed—not Ham, but Ham's son, Canaan.

After the Flood there was an unfortunate incident where Noah got drunk on wine that he had made. The Bible is unclear about what exactly happened as a result. All we know is that Noah was naked in his tent and his son, Ham, saw his father's nakedness and told his brothers outside. This was considered extremely shameful and so much speculation is made about this. Some believe that Ham committed a sexual act against his father, but Scripture does not state that. It may just have been as simple as Ham laughing at his father's nakedness. We don't really know what happened and we must not read more into the text than is there. When Noah awoke he then pronounced both blessings and cursings on his descendants.

Genesis 9:25-27 (NKJV) Then he said: "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brethren." And he said: "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem, and may Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth, and may he dwell in the tents of Shem; and may Canaan be his servant."

Notice that Ham is never even mentioned in these verses at all. It is Canaan, one of Ham's sons, who Noah is focusing on as the object of the curse. It is Canaan whose land was later inherited by Abraham's descendants. Only sin can cause a person to lose their land. If the Canaanites were not a sinful people the Israelites would never have received that land from God. Also, descendants of Canaan lived in Sodom and Gomorrah that were destroyed by fire and brimstone that rained down from Heaven in Abraham's day. So it seems that somehow Noah caught a glimpse of Canaan's future and saw how wicked his descendants would be and that is why he made the declaration that he did.

What is a blessing?

The Hebraic Blessing

Even today, it is a Jewish custom for a father to impart a blessing to his sons shortly before his death. Think of the blessing as being like a prophecy. It is divine. In other words, the father cannot just say whatever he wants to. He is supposed to speak as God leads him. Therefore, the blessing is not the father's favor—it is God's favor. It cannot be changed or revoked. Once the father speaks it is the same as if God spoke it. And God never breaks His Word...

These blessings are highly prophetic in nature and foretell the destiny of the child as well as the family line that would come through that child. Because blessings are divinely inspired they come true regardless of the actions of the recipient.

1. A blessing comes from a father to his son/s.

In part 15 of this study we looked at what a father is. We saw that a father is not necessarily a physical father. Instead, a father is one who produces after his own kind. Abraham is our father, not because we are physical descendants of his (most of us are in fact Gentiles by birth), but because we are following in his footsteps, copying his faith and friendship with God.

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A true son of Abraham:

1. is a reflection of his father (John 8:19)
2. does not speak his own words, but speaks what his father taught him (John 8:28)
3. does what pleases his father (John 8:29)
4. is free of sin (John 8:34,35)
5. has a permanent place in the family. (John 8:34,35)
6. does what Abraham did (John 8:39)
7. is a son of God (John 8:42)
8. loves Jesus (John 8:42)
9. believes the words of Jesus (John 8:46)
10. hears God's words spoken by Jesus (John 8:47)
11. glorifies God the Father (John 8:50)
12. knows God the Father (John 8:55)
13. keeps God's word (John 8:55)
14. rejoices in Jesus, the one who walked the covenant walk in our place (John 8:56)

Because we are sons of Abraham, the blessings of Abraham belong to us.

2. A blessing has nothing to do with gender.

Genesis 1:27-28 (NKJV) So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Genesis 5:1-2 (NKJV) This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind [Adam] in the day they were created.

God blessed male and female the same. Both were to fill the earth and subdue it. They were to be co-rulers and reign together in God's Kingdom. God has never changed this. Sin caused us to change but God's plan never waivered at all. Sin caused men and women to dominate and oppress one another.

I wonder if we realize how liberating Jesus' message was to women. In Jewish society women are seen as second-class citizens. Even today Jewish men pray daily, thanking God that they were not made female. Through the centuries many Jewish rabbis refused to even allow women to read the Torah. Imagine not being allowed to read the Bible just because you are a woman? But that is how it was. In stark contrast, Jesus had women sitting at His feet as disciples. In Jesus' day there was even a separate court in the Jewish Temple for women (not by God's design!). Women were not even allowed to worship with the men. Understanding that, picture the events that Luke wrote about when Jesus healed a woman on the Sabbath.

Luke 13:10-17 Now He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath. And behold, there was a woman who had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bent over and could in no way raise herself up. But when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him and said to her, "Woman, you are loosed from your infirmity." And He laid His hands on her, and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. But the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath; and he said to the crowd, "There are six days on which men ought to work; therefore come and be healed on them, and not on the Sabbath day." The Lord then answered him and said, "Hypocrite! Does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or donkey from the stall, and lead it away to water it? So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has bound—think of it—for eighteen years,

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be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” And when He said these things, all His adversaries were put to shame; and all the multitude rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him.

What Jesus did was astounding. It is not clear if He called her into the men’s court or if He went across into the women’s court. Either way, He completely ignored the wall of separation between the men and women in the Temple. Another thing that He did that was most astounding is He identified her as a “daughter of Abraham.” This is the only place in the whole Bible that anyone is identified in this way. He exposed their shame – for they treated their women lower than animals. But Jesus elevated women. Jesus gave them honor.

Paul’s teachings about women have been misunderstood and have been used to keep women in silent submission (which in modern terminology is no different from oppression) for centuries. However, Paul shared the same views on women that Jesus did for he ministered alongside women for many years and it was Paul who said “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28). Paul studied under a well-known Jewish rabbi called Gamaliel who, although it seems he was never a believer in Jesus, did not agree with most Jewish view concerning women and taught and disciplined his own daughter in the Torah.

Consider also how God, when He changed Abram’s name to Abraham as part of the covenant ritual, also changed Sarai’s name to Sarah. God doesn’t leave the women out. They count as much as the men do. Often when you see the word “man” it is referring to Mankind, not just males. Adam was male and female, so it is not about gender.

3. A blessing is a prophetic declaration of the son’s destiny.

We see this with Noah’s prophetic declaration of Canaan’s destiny, as well as that of his sons, Shem and Japheth. We have also seen this earlier on in the study when we were introduced to Noah by his father, Lamech.

Genesis 5:28-29 (NKJV) Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.”

This was a blessing—a prophetic declaration—that seems to have been given at the beginning of Noah’s life, not at the end of Lamech’s life. (God blessed Adam and Eve when He created them too so blessings can be given from the start of a life as well.) Lamech knew that something about this child would bring the Earth into a state of rest. He may not have had the whole picture but he did have a glimpse of the child’s destiny.

There are many other examples of this as we progress through this study. In fact, we will soon look at how desperate Jacob was to receive a blessing, so much so that he wrestled God for it!

4. A blessing is a passing on of the baton.

Our Christian lives are often described by Paul and others as being a race. We are all running this race... and in many respects it is a relay race. We run with the baton of the high calling in Christ Jesus that has been passed down from Jesus to the disciples to Paul and down the centuries to us.

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 (NKJV) Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I

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run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NKJV) Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

5. A blessing is linked to your identity / name.

A blessing is always linked to your identity. We will soon look at this with Jacob as he wrestles with the preincarnate Christ. He wrestles for a blessing and the blessing that he receives is a change of name, which is a change of identity.

In closing, consider Genesis 9:1

Genesis 9:1 (NKJV) So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.

1. Notice that this is an echo of His original blessing to Adam and Eve. God reinstated Noah and his sons—back to the position that Adam and Eve were in the garden in Eden in the beginning. This shows us that He started humanity all over again.
2. It is a father who blesses his sons. Thus, God was reaffirming them as His sons and Himself as their Father.

Homework Question # 1: Up until recently, the Mormon Church taught that “Cain, Ham, and the whole Negro race have been cursed with a black skin, the mark of Cain, so they can be identified as a caste apart, a people with whom the other descendants of Adam should not intermarry.” What is God’s opinion on this matter?

Homework Question # 2: Most of us did not have godly parents who understood the power of the blessing. But if God is your Father then your Bible is full of His promises and declarations over your life personally. With the Bible and God’s revealed word to you as your guide, write as if penning the words of your Father God speaking a blessing over YOU, His beloved child.
