

GENESIS 9–11

Noah's Vineyard (9:18–29)

Story has provoked a number of colorful readings; but rather than letting contemporary cultural issues drive our reading, we should attend to the larger “canvas” (chapters 1–11) . . .

Numerous hints have already been given that this is a “new creation” story: e.g., the reversal of creation back to its watery, unformed, unfilled condition (cf. 1:2); the movement of a *ruach* over the face of the waters (8:1); the refilling of the world with swarming creatures (8:17); the blessing and commissioning of humankind to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (9:1); a renewed identification of man as made in God’s image, with provisions for the protection of that image in a world of sin (9:5–6); and an explicit covenant between God and all flesh that harks back to His sovereignly established, implicitly promissory love-bond with all living creatures in the beginning

The parallels between this new beginning and Genesis 1 should make us anticipate parallels with Genesis 2 – Adam’s life began with a sabbath and a garden; here Noah’s first act after worship is to cultivate and keep a vineyard – after years of toil in building and managing the ark, must have been a pleasure: he is taking dominion, entering a period of cultural advancement (leisure, “finer things”) – coupled with the fact that he has been given authority in judgment, perhaps a glimmer of “resurrection life” in a new world; Noah’s father prophesied that he would bring rest from the exhausting toil of the curse, and that seems to be on display here

Sadly, amid this sabbatical scene, another “fall” occurs – it would be easy to identify Noah as the sinner, but should pause over the fact that the text doesn’t condemn him – “drunk” *may* simply refer to a state of relaxation induced by wine (cf. Ruth 3:7); the laying aside of his garment may symbolize resting from the labors of taking dominion (the garment, as we have seen, is a symbol of authority/rule) – on the other hand . . .

Text clearly identifies *Ham* as a wrongdoer – what exactly is his wrongdoing? he sees his father’s nakedness and reports it, apparently with “the garment” (v. 23) in hand – Noah has laid aside his symbol of authority to rest; Ham sees this and exploits an opportunity to grasp it – like Adam, he grasps at greater glory (his father’s desirable position as the new world ruler) – but he doesn’t get the response he expects! Shem and Japheth are faithful sons: honor father by restoring symbol of authority (acknowledging their place under him until his death)

There may be something else here as well: true sons of God want to cover shame, guilt, weakness; they want to restore dignity, lift up the fallen, protect the vulnerable (like God Himself)

As there is a fall in the new world, there is also another *curse* that entails further conflict between two lines of seed (and the promise of 3:15 becomes clearer): Ham isn’t cursed, nor all of his seed; his youngest son Canaan is cursed in an oracle of amazing foresight that clearly sets up the story of Abram and would have been especially important to Moses’ readers on the borders of Canaan

“By naming Canaan rather than Ham in the curse a pun was introduced. The curse of servitude was suggested by the very sound of the name Canaan (whatever its etymology), for the verb *kana* . . . means ‘subdue.’ It is used for God’s subjugation of the Canaanites under the Israelites at the time of their entry into their promised inheritance (Deut 9:3; Judg 4:23; Neh 9:24). And that conquest is the actual event in which the curse on Canaan took effect. Israel’s warfare against Canaan was not just another skirmish in the secular round of wars and rumors of wars but a redemptive intervention of God, appropriating the promised land for his holy kingdom realm on earth. The conquered Canaanites are to be seen as representatives of the serpent’s seed, crushed under the heel of the redeemed people of the Lord in a typological act of judgment pointing to the Final Judgment.” (Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 266)

Japheth's descendants are also mentioned: they will enjoy victory over the seed of the serpent by entering "the tents of Shem" (Gentiles will be saved through Shem's seed)

Noah's Descendants (10:1–32)

To see how chapters 10 and 11 fit together, it's important to notice that the Babel story (11:1–9) is sandwiched between two genealogies (10:1–32; 11:10–32) – curiously, both of these genealogies cover roughly the same time period, most of which occurs *after* Babel; so why put one genealogy *before* the Babel story? – to answer this, need to back to up Eden . . .

God's purposes for humankind were symbolized in (1) a *garden* (where humans were unified in worshipping Him) and (2) four *rivers* (by which humans would be diversified as different families and tribes traveled to different places and established different cultures) – God's intent was that the human race, unified by communion with Him, disperse and diversify in exercising dominion throughout the world (this intent is reiterated after the Flood) – both before and after the Flood, however, humans rebel against God's intent; they neither disperse nor diversity in multicultural service to Him, but unite in a mono-cultural attempt to seize His sovereignty for themselves

Before we get to the culmination of humankind's post-Flood rebellion, however, we get a glimpse of God's purpose being fulfilled despite all human agendas to the contrary; we see mankind after the Flood spreading out, filling the earth, multiplying, hunting, and building as God commanded in 9:1–7 – seventy nations are listed: God's plans always include the *fullness of nations* – yet . . .

The nations are diversified without a unifying center of worship (communion with the true God); the "rivers" don't flow from a common "garden-temple" – this is perhaps why Shem's genealogy is given here (10:21–31), only to be repeated *after* the Babel story (11:10ff): the later version will take us from the darkness of Babel to the dawn of the Abram story; here it leads *to* Babel, for all nations (including the Shemites) are scattered *under God's judgment* . . .

Megapolis and Multiculturalism (11:1–9)

Probably within a few generations of the Flood (likely in Peleg's time, 10:25), the unified mass of Noah's descendants conceives a massive building project, energized (v. 4) by two motives: pride (rather than go outward under God's rule, they want to build upward and displace His rule with their own) and fear (desperate to reestablish dominion and communion without God)

What happens next is comical (vv. 5–9) . . .

Having scattered the nations, God will one day unite them again by the only thing that can truly unify without destroying the diversity He desires – the "gospel" does not destroy the diversity of nations, languages, and cultures, but unifies them in the worship of the true and living God (by a common confession that Jesus is Savior and Lord) – this is the miracle of Pentecost

"Luke's [Pentecost account] is accompanied by a 'table of nations' (Acts 2:8–12), just as the Genesis record of the confusing of human language is accompanied by a 'table of nations' (Gn. 10:1–32). . . . On the Day of Pentecost that new community became the sphere in which the eschatological reversal of the effects of sin began to appear in a reconciled people consisting of both Jew and Gentile, possessing one Lord, one faith and one baptism . . . united by the Spirit. The effects of Babel were thus arrested. Now the word of reconciliation will be preached in many languages . . ." (Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 60)

Shem's Descendants (11:10–32)

Shem's second genealogy runs from Babel through Peleg (10:25), and *not* a promising genealogy!

Next time: Genesis 12–14