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## Does the Bible Support Racism? (Part I)

**Genesis 9:18:** (NASB) *Now the sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan.*

Racism - it is one of the hardest, most emotional and divisive subjects in our present culture. Understanding what it means, where it came from and how to deal with it are some of the many pressing questions that surround this issue. One of the utterly false reasonings that helped to provoke our modern day racial experience is "The Curse of Ham." What does it mean, where did it come from and how do we know that it is wrong? Let's us find out!

**The Curse of Ham:** *A belief that Ham, the son of Noah, was cursed so that his sons would all have their skin darkened, and they would be destined to be the slaves of all the other offspring of Noah's other two sons...*

This belief would feed the justification for keeping slaves of African descent. But is it true? To understand this "Curse of Ham" business, we need to establish the context.

**What is unusual about this text?** Genesis 9:18-23: Why is only one of Noah's 16 grandsons, Canaan, mentioned here?

### Observations:

- Verse 20 - A process of several years was necessary from the coming out from the ark to the planting and harvesting in order for this event to take place, for the youngest son of Ham is mentioned. (Remember, between Genesis 1 and Genesis 6 was 1,656 years! Massive amounts of time transpire between verses.)
- Verse 21 - This is the first mention of wine and drunkenness in Scripture - perhaps the changed atmospheric condition caused a fermenting that had never occurred before and took Noah by surprise.
- Verse 22 - Ham sees Noah and tells his brothers. Was this a bad thing? (We will come back to this.)
- Verse 23 - Shem and Japheth display propriety and respect.

Back to Verse 22 - Ham did not exercise the propriety he obviously knew about. Instead he *told his two brothers outside*.

**Told:** Hebrew English Lexicon #5046 1) to be conspicuous, tell, make known; 2) to tell, declare

This indicates a flippant and disrespectful attitude about matters of dignity - not just an oversight. Something was wrong with the way Ham reacted to how he saw his father, Noah.

Proverbs 14:9: (NASB) *Fools mock at sin, but among the upright there is good will.*

1 Peter 4:8-10: (NRSV) *Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins. <sup>9</sup>Be hospitable to one another without complaining. <sup>10</sup>Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received.*

So, where does the "Curse of Ham" come in?

(Source: Excerpts from Wikipedia) ...In medieval Christian exegesis, Ham's sin was regarded as laughter (for mocking his father and doing nothing to rectify his condition). Elsewhere in Medieval Europe, the "Curse of Ham" also became used as a justification for serfdom. Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1100) was the first recorded to propose a caste system associating Ham with serfdom, writing that serfs were descended from Ham, nobles from Japheth, and free men from Shem.

Genesis 9:24-27: (NASB) <sup>24</sup>*When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him. <sup>25</sup>So he said, Cursed be Canaan; A servant of servants he shall be to his brothers. <sup>26</sup>He also said, blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; And let Canaan be his servant. <sup>27</sup>May God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.*



**Observations:**

- Verse 24 - Noah knows of the mockery, humiliation and exposure to which he was subjected.

Ham *told his two brothers* **outside** - this word, coupled with *told*, helps us see an attitude:

**Outside:** Hebrew English Lexicon #2351, outside, outward, street, the outside

Ham made his father's condition conspicuous to those elsewhere - like gossiping in the street. He went to expose what he saw without respect or shame. He did nothing to respect his father!

- Verse 25 - Canaan was cursed - but he was not there! But where is the curse of Ham? Why is Canaan cursed instead?
- This curse is one of servitude. What people did Canaan's posterity become? (We will come back to this.)
- Verses 26 and 27 - Blessings were given to Noah's other two sons and a restating of the curse on Canaan.

Why did Noah curse Canaan, his grandson, for something that Ham, his son, did? And did this in any way reflect on the future generations of the black race?

**Observations:**

- Noah's curse was a prophecy. As a man of God, he was given a gift to foretell the future.
- This prophecy of Noah revealed that the character flaw of Ham's perverted satisfaction would be present and perhaps greater in Canaan.

So, does this curse of Canaan relate to black Africans? NO! How do we know? Genesis 10 tells us the genealogies and geography of Noah's sons and their descendants.

(Source: Excerpts from Wikipedia) ...The explanation that black Africans, as the "sons of Ham," were cursed, possibly "blackened" by their sins, was advanced only sporadically during the Middle Ages, but it became increasingly common during the slave trade of the 18th and 19th centuries. The justification of slavery itself through the sins of Ham was well suited to the ideological interests of the elite; with the emergence of the slave trade, its racialized version justified the exploitation of African labor.

Genesis 10:6-7: (NASB) <sup>6</sup>*The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan.* <sup>7</sup>*The sons of Cush were Seba and Havilah and Sabtah and Raamah and Sabteca; and the sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.*

- Cush would eventually settle Ethiopia (in Africa)
- Mizraim would eventually settle Egypt (in Africa)
- Put would eventually settle Libya (in Africa)
- Canaan would eventually settle Canaan (in Asia)

Note the three grandsons *not* cursed settled in Africa. The cursed grandson, Canaan, did *not* settle in Africa.

Before we get to Canaan and what happened there, we need to make one more important point regarding the misnomer of "The Curse of Ham." If Ham's sons were cursed to servitude, then how do we explain the following genealogy from the next verses?

Genesis 10:8-12: Nimrod was mighty, though not a God-fearing man and according to many Bible scholars, he was black. He was not under servitude but instead ruled over others. Where did he rule? Shinar - this is where Babylon, the first mighty empire of the world, was established. Obviously this cannot be in line with the supposed "Curse of Ham."



**So, what *did* happen to Canaan?** Deuteronomy 9:1-5: (NASB) *<sup>1</sup>Hear, O Israel! You are crossing over the Jordan today to go in to dispossess **nations** (these were "city states" - like mini nations, all from the lineage of Canaan) greater and mightier than you, great cities fortified to heaven, <sup>2</sup>a people great and tall, the sons of the Anakim, whom you know and of whom you have heard it said, Who can stand before the sons of Anak? <sup>3</sup>Know therefore today that it is the LORD your God who is crossing over before you as a consuming fire. He will destroy them and He will subdue them before you, so that you may drive them out and destroy them quickly, just as the LORD has spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, <sup>5</sup>Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you.*

God was not giving the land to the Israelites because they were so good, it was because the Canaanites were so bad! Canaan was populated by deep and dark wickedness. At this time also some Philistines (descendants of Japheth) were in Canaan. Between the Philistines and Israel (descendants of Shem) we see the prophecy of Noah fulfilled - not against a black nation and certainly NOT in Africa! So, if this curse of Ham is in no way biblical, then where did it come from?

(Source: Wikipedia) ...In the parts of Africa where Christianity flourished in the early days, while it was still illegal in Rome, this idea never took hold, and its interpretation of scripture was never adopted by the African Coptic Churches. A modern Amharic commentary on Genesis notes the 19th century and earlier European theory that blacks were subject to whites as a result of the "curse of Ham," but calls this a false teaching unsupported by the text of the Bible, emphatically pointing out that Noah's curse fell not upon all descendants of Ham, but only on the descendants of Canaan, and asserting that it was fulfilled when Canaan was occupied by both Semites (Israel) and Japhetites. The commentary further notes that Canaanites ceased to exist politically after the Third Punic War (149 BC), and that their current descendants are thus unknown and scattered among all peoples.

**We KNOW the "Curse of Ham" did NOT come from any true Christian origin:** Acts 17:22-28: The ignorance of this world is truly blinding! God has complete, total and unequivocal equality in viewing the race of humanity. All of the human race can equally search for God. Christianity began with that understanding but throughout the ages took some wrong turns contrary to true Christian principles.

(Source: Blog -The Origins of the Curse of Ham, By Jeremy Pierce, April 22, 2008) ...The people who first came up with this justification for slavery of Africans were very early Muslims, and that view was dominant within the Islamic world (but not outside it) for 100 years until it spread to Europeans via contact with the Spanish and their treatment of Moors. Then Europeans and eventually colonial Americans began to adopt it. So it wasn't even initially a misreading of the Bible. The relevant parts of the Qur'an don't mention Ham at all, so it's not even a misreading of the Qur'an. It's simply a fabrication in order to justify the kind of slavery Muslims had been imposing on black Africans.

History also tells us that Muslims did not limit their slavery victims to just black men and women. In his book "Christian Slaves, Muslim Masters: White Slavery in the Mediterranean, the Barbary Coast and Italy, 1500-1800," Robert Davis (Professor of History - Ohio State University) observed, "...from AD 1500 to 1650, when trans-Atlantic slaving to the United States was still in its infancy, more white Christian slaves were probably taken to Africa than black slaves to the Americas. ...one million to 1.25 million white slaves."

Galatians 3:27-29: There is an equality in Christ.

One last quote on the historical perspective of "The Curse of Ham" and its origin:

(Source: Blog -The Origins of the Curse of Ham, By Jeremy Pierce, April 22, 2008) ...It was early Muslims who first (as far as we know) developed the idea that Ham was cursed. I found a quote in Edwin Yamauchi's "Africa and the Bible" from a Muslim who wrote in the late 7th to early 8th centuries, and the whole view is right there. Noah cursed Ham (not Canaan) by imposing slavery on Africans whenever the descendants of Shem would come across them. It attributes their hair type to the curse as well (but not, interestingly, their skin color, though it does mention their skin color). A 9th century Muslim does bring in a change of skin color because of the curse, and Yamauchi mentions other sources attributing natural slavery to black Africans because of this curse, a view that I'm pretty sure doesn't become entrenched in Europe or the Americas until the slave trade was well underway.

So, this was a made up justification for things they were already doing.



God and favoritism - is that similar to racism?

Merriam Webster definition: **Racism**

- 1: a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race
- 2: racial prejudice or discrimination

So, the logical question would be, did the reasons for God choosing "favorites" equate to this definition? **Here are some of God's "favorites:"** **Genesis 6:5-8:** Through the faithful work and life of Noah, God spared humanity. (We are glad He had a favorite or else we would not be here!) Noah preached for over 100 years, so others had the opportunity to live righteously.

**Abraham was another "favorite" and given the first promise of unique far-reaching favor:** **Genesis 12:1-3:** Why was Abram given this unprecedented promise? He was willing to follow God! **Abram would be tested on his dedication, especially with the test regarding Isaac:** **Genesis 22:18:** Of course we know that Isaac was a "favorite" as well as Jacob, who became the father of Israel.

**What can we observe about God's favor?**

- He rewards those who diligently follow His precepts.
- His timetable is much longer than ours - He allows suffering to seemingly drag on.
- He chooses "favorites" for the purpose of benefiting all of the rest! God's favoritism is contrary to racism. Racism has nothing to do with kindness, love, mercy and justice. God's favoritism is for the building up of all mankind for eternity.

**Does God elevate his favored ones the same way a racist elevates his own race?**

We know that Jacob's name was changed to "Israel" and his 12 sons became the 12 tribes of Israel. Once they were delivered from the slavery in Egypt (which by the way is an interesting way for God to show his favor to them) and once they finished wandering in the wilderness for 40 years (another example of God's favor!) they were finally in position to inherit their long-promised land. What did God's favor require of them?

**Instruction regarding their "separate" existence as a favored people:** **Deuteronomy 7:1-12**  
**No mixing of societies or creating alliances/No mixing of families and no mercy on His own people if they turn from Him/No mixing of worship/You are a different people than those around you/No mercy on those who perpetuate sinful practices/No breaking of His promise to protect them if they remain true**

To God, favoritism equates to requiring much of those favored for the purpose of having them live a higher life than those around them as an example of loyalty to something higher than themselves. The purpose was for them to be positioned to BLESS all of the rest! This is not racism but blessing according to God's own time clock. That is why we can be assured God has no sense of racism in His creation and does not want it in us against each other.

 **Free at Last, Martin Luther King, August 28, 1963**

- *...Let freedom ring (crowd cheering and clapping) and when this happens, when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when ALL of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*

God's plan will make all of us "free at last," and there will be no racism and no favoritism that does not bring glory to all mankind. That is God's plan through Jesus.

***So, does the Bible support racism? (NO!)  
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...  
Think about it...!***