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The Sin of Ham

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In Genesis chapter nine we see the first record of sin after the flood. Noah becomes drunk and his son Ham finds him naked.¹ Instead of covering his father and leaving him there alone, Ham goes and tells his two brothers who then come and cover their father.² The question then becomes, what exactly was the sin of Ham in this case?

Though there are many theories on what occurred during this scene, the Bible is surprisingly quiet on the details leaving scholars to “figure out” the details themselves.³ What is known is that Ham saw his father’s nakedness. Perhaps Noah was embarrassed about the fact that his son had seen him naked as some scholars suggest.⁴ This would be an understandable expectation but is it possible that the act goes deeper than that?

Some scholars suggest an actual act of sexual nature by Ham against his father.⁵ The problem with this interpretation is that it reads a lot into the text. There is no clear evidence in Scripture that this is anywhere near the case being portrayed in Genesis Chapter Nine. However, the theory is still popular despite the lack of evidence.

An interesting point of view is that the sin was symbolic of and parallel to the original sin. In both instances the sinner realizes their nakedness and were ashamed.⁶ This interpretation is a conservative approach in that it does not read anything into the text but merely recognizes a similarity between two passages and situations. Robertson, however, rejects this view stating that it would be unlikely for Noah to have a memory of a simple “look” in his drunken state.⁷

A final point of view comes from John Davis who correlates the passage with Habakkuk 2:15 which talks about seeing the nakedness of a neighbor in their drunken state.⁸ This is perhaps the best of all of the interpretations as it is a blend of the original sin account and also the shame of nakedness found throughout the Bible.

Through the reading of the text and the searching of Scripture it seems that the best answer to what the nature of Ham’s sin was, is that he looked upon his father with his naked state and dishonored him. As has been mentioned before, Ham could have covered his father rather than trotting off to tell his brothers about the spectacle.

¹ Genesis 9:22

² Genesis 9:23

³ John J. Davis, “Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis” (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing, 1975), 128–129.

⁴ OP Robertson, “Current Critical Questions Concerning the ‘Curse of Ham’ (Gen 9: 20-27),” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (1998): 20–27, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/41/41-2/41-2-pp177-188-JETS.pdf>.

⁵ John Sietze, Scott Walker Hahn, and John Sietze Bergsma, “Noah’s Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan (Genesis 9:20-27),” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 124, no. 1 (2005): 25–40.

⁶ AJ Tomasino, “History Repeats Itself: The ‘Fall’ and Noah’s Drunkenness,” *Vetus testamentum* 42 (1992): 128–130, accessed April 24, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1519131>.

⁷ Robertson, “Current Critical Questions Concerning the ‘Curse of Ham’ (Gen 9: 20-27).”

⁸ Davis, “Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis.”

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