

## **What does it mean in Genesis 9.25 when the Bible says “I will put a curse on Canaan”?**

First, I would call attention to a very helpful book that addresses a lot of the difficult questions we all have on Scripture: *Hard Sayings of the Bible*, [HSB], compiled by four prestigious Bible scholars. It's available in the church library, I believe. And it's available in paperback and on Kindle. I also can share a PDF open source copy.

Here's some of what it says in response to your question about the meaning of the curse on Canaan: Most of us do not know or remember that this passage was misapplied as a “biblical” justification for the slavery of blacks. The HSB makes clear this is a false and completely malicious interpretation of this passage. Then it goes on to describe the scene the Bible portrays. It gives this interpretation to the meaning:

“What exactly Ham did has been the subject of much speculation.” And the author goes on to examine some of the more outlandish speculations that appear in the history of interpretation of this passage.

Then, this:

“Thus, Ham could be faulted simply for this: he failed to cover up his father's nakedness and chose rather to make fun of his father to his brothers. Such an act was serious enough to prompt Noah to utter his curse on Ham's descendants, who would be guilty of the kinds of sexual perversions that many suspected Ham of carrying out. To lie exposed meant that one was unprotected, dishonored and at risk of exploitation. Ham had transgressed a natural and sacred barrier. His disgusting ridicule of his father before his brothers aggravated the act and perhaps betrayed a moral weakness that had established itself in his personality. ....

Still, there may well have been an element of “mirroring” punishment here, especially if Canaan was to exhibit the out-workings of the tendencies already present in Ham's failure to cover Noah's nakedness. Finally, it is a matter of historical record that the Canaanites were notoriously deviant in their sexual behavior. Almost everywhere the archaeologist's spade has dug in that part of the world there have been fertility symbols accompanying texts explicit enough to make many a modern pornographic dealer seem a mere beginner in the trade of deviant sexuality. Sodom left its name for the vice these people practiced. Even the Romans, so depraved in their own practices, were shocked by the behavior of the Phoenicians at the colony of Carthage (the last vestige of the Canaanite race).

Why was this story included in the biblical narrative? It tells the reader that unless there was some moral change in the Canaanites, they were slated for removal from their land. That God is long-suffering and slow to anger is attested by the fact that this judgment did not fall on that group of descendants until the time of Joshua's conquest of Canaan. It is impossible to date Noah's times, but it is known that Joshua lived around 1400 B.C. At a minimum this would mean that the grace of God was extended to the Canaanites for several millennia. Surely God was most generous with these people, giving more than adequate time for sinners to repent.”

Lots of things are not clear at this point in history. We just do not know everything. What we do know is that God uses history to bring his judgment, even if it is delayed.