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Ham's Crime and the Curse of Canaan: An Interpretation of genesis 9:20-27 and its Implications for Christians in Africa

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Abstract

The text of Genesis 9:20-27 has been debated among scholarly realms for over 2000 years. Much of the debate is centred on Ham's crime and the curse of Canaan. The questions raised are speculative. What was the gravity of Ham's crime to merit such a curse? Did he only see his father's nakedness or do something more than that? Why did Noah curse Canaan instead of Ham the offender? Was this an ethnic curse or prophetic? Over the years the interpretation of this text has profound implications for contemporary Christian communities, particularly in Africa. It is often linked to the justification of slavery, harmful stereotypes, and racial hierarchies that have had lasting effects on social dynamics. The obscure biblical text has attracted several views and interpretations by biblical scholars beginning with the Jews, Muslims, Europeans, Americans, and Mormons giving their various interpretations based on ideological interests and understanding. In this study, we shall consider some traditional views of interpretation including-voyeurism, castration, paternal, and maternal incest, their strengths and weaknesses; with the argument that if the text is understood in a broader context, Noah's first and last recorded words (Gen.9:25-27), could be prophetic oracles referring to Canaan and his future descendants, thereby giving the text a literal understanding which is here taken as the alternative view. This nuanced understanding of Genesis 9:20-27 can inspire a transformative approach to social ethics in African Christianity today.

Keywords: Voyeurisms, Castration, Maternal incest, Paternal incest, Curse.

Introduction

The meaning and interpretation of the Genesis 9:20-27 narrative has been a matter of debate, distortion and contention among scholars from antiquity. Earlier interpreters assumed that the biblical flood was a global phenomenon, which killed all humankind except Noah and his descendants: Shem, Ham and Japheth, who were reckoned as the progenitors of the rest of the human race.

According to these groups of scholars, since Ham is considered the ancestor of Africans, it explains the reason why slavery of Africans became widespread among the Arabs, and then among the Europeans and Americans (Yamauchi 2004, 19). To elucidate further, Wittenberg (1991, 46 citing Bello, 1986, 108) quotes Fidel Castro as saying "I was taught that one of Noah's sons was punished by having black descendants. Somebody should check to see if this is being taught today and if it's really proper for religion to teach that being black is a punishment of God".

The interpretive debate of the Genesis narrative revolves around two interpretative questions. First, is the nature of Ham's offence; why would Ham's "seeing" Noah's nakedness merit a curse? Secondly, the rationale for Canaan's punishment; if Ham was the reprobate why was Canaan cursed instead? (Goldenberg 2003, 66).

The task of this paper therefore is to examine and assess the various schools of interpretation of the Genesis 9:20-27 narrative: Voyeurism, Castration, Paternal incest and Maternal incest views. This is to enable us to come up with the strengths and weaknesses of each interpretation. The historical-grammatical method will be applied in order to distinguish between the original meaning of the text and its significance devoid of the Eurocentric, Afro-American and Afrocentric, and other methodologies and forms of interpretation.

The Bible text: Genesis 9:20-27:

> 20 Noah, a man of the soil,
> was the first to plant a
> vineyard. 21 He drank some
> of the wine and became
> drunk, and he lay uncovered
> in his tent. 22 And Ham, the
> father of Canaan, saw the
> nakedness of his father and
> told his two brothers outside.
> 23 Then Shem and Japheth
> took a garment, laid it on both
> their shoulders, and walked
> backwards and covered the
> nakedness of their father;
> their faces were turned away,
> and they did not see their
> father's nakedness. 24 When
> Noah awoke from his wine
> and knew what his youngest
> son had done to him, 25 he
> said,
> "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of
> slaves shall he be to his
> brothers."
> 26 He also said, "Blessed by
> the Lord my God be Shem;
> And let Canaan be his
> slave.27 May God make
> space for Japheth,
> And let him live in the tents of
> Shem, and let Canaan be his
> slave."
> (NRSV)

The Storyline:

The basic outlines of the story as presented in Genesis 9:20-27 are well known to us. After the flood subsided, Noah planted a vineyard,

drank its wine and became drunk. Noah enters his tent and sleeps uncovered. Most commentators believe that this was Noah's first experience with the intoxication effect of wine leaving him in an ugly position (Yamauchi 2004, 20). Citing the incident of Lot's daughters with their father (Gen 19:30-38) and David and Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:12-13), Hirst Cohen, suggests that Noah purposely drank the wine to obtain the Seminal potency necessary for the prodigious task of repopulating the earth (1974, 17). Noah was six hundred years old, and this event was sometime after the flood. It takes years for a vineyard to produce, not to mention that Noah now had numerous grandsons. As a seasoned man of the soil, Noah was quite aware of what wine could do, he was no helpless victim, he passed out because his drinking had gone out of control. The Hebrews for lay uncovered "*gala"* suggests that Noah was completely inebriated that he stripped himself naked and passed out, all covered with shame (Hughes 2004, 150).

Ham took a sniggering delight in the spectacle of his aged father who slept naked in his tent. He also took perverse pleasure in exposing his father's folly to his two brothers – Shem and Japheth. His action did not only mock and ridicule his father, it was a heinous breach of the hierarchical order of creation. Ham desecrated his filial relationship, sinning against both his father and God. In effect, he (Ham) uncovered his father's nakedness (Hughes 2004, 152). According to Cohen, H. (1974, 13), other Christian writers like Theophilus of Antioch and many Jewish Rabbis speculated that either Ham or Canaan Castrated Noah. And Bassett, argues further, that Ham had an incestuous relationship with his mother which explains why Noah cursed only one of Ham's several sons if it is further assumed that Canaan was the fruit of such a case of incest (1971, 235).

The scriptures simply present that Ham's misdeed consisted of gazing at the nakedness of his father. Allen Ross puts it this way "Ham's frivolous looking, moral flaws, represent the first step in the abandonment of moral code. Moreover this violation of a boundary destroyed the honour of Noah" (1980, 230). Ham actually made his case worse by gossiping about what he had seen to his brothers which amounted to tempting his brothers with forbidden knowledge, the opportunity to see their father's nakedness (Tomasino 1992, 128-30). Leon Kass observed that Noah's drunkenness robbed him of his dignity, paternal authority and humanity. He puts it:

Besides, what Ham did is more than sufficiently odious even though he did not lay a hand on Noah …

> Ham's viewing and telling is metaphorically, an act of patricide and incest, of overturning the father as a father….Eliminated is the father as an authority, as a guide, as a teacher of law, custom and a way of life (1992,41).

The Curse On Canaan:

Exegetes over the years from the time of Philo have grappled with the question as to why Noah cursed Canaan rather than Ham (Lewis 1968, 56-7). According to David Neiman, the curse was a contemporary war cry of the Israelites, who in the late Bronze Age were in alliance with the sons of Japheth; and the Philistines in their mutual antagonism against the Canaanites, the sons of Ham (1966, 113-34). Kass (1992, 45), argues for the appropriateness of Noah's

response; "measure for measure" Noah drives a wedge between Ham and his youngest son Canaan. Ham who seeks to free himself from parental authority and law, will be held responsible by his son Canaan as a parental authority for the evil that befall him.

The Curse of Ham among the Jews:

The so-called thought that the curse on Canaan was God's curse on descendants of Ham with black skin and destined for slavery, originated first in the Jewish circles (McKenzie 1993, 268). The Midrash (sermonic stories) in Genesis contains the following:

> Noah declared; you have prevented me from begetting a fourth son therefore I curse your fourth son. Rabbi Huna also said; in Rabbi Joseph's name you have prevented me from doing something in the dark (cohabitation) therefore your seed will be ugly and dark-skinned. Rabbi Hiyya said that Ham and the dog copulated in the ark, therefore Ham came forth black-skinned while the dog publicly exposed his copulation (freedman and Simon 1939, 36).

The Babylonian Talmud (sixth century), says, three copulated in the ark, and they were all punished – the dog, the raven and Ham. The dog was doomed to be tied, the raven coughed his seed into his mate's mouth, and Ham was smitten by his black skin (Epstein 1969, 108). A closer examination of these texts renders the Jewish theory of the curse of Noah implausible. Ephraim, Isaac argues that one cannot apply or transfer the curse against Canaan and the prejudices against the Canaanites to Cush or his descendants. Both Biblical sources and rabbinic sources seem so ambiguous in the distinction they make between Canaan the forefather of the Canaanites and Cush the forefather of the black people (Isaac 1985, 75-9). He argues further:

> In rabbinic literature, we do not find an implication that the descendants of the accursed Canaan are black or African … it was Cush and not Canaan who inhabited Africa South of Egypt (1985, 77).

Furthermore, Talmudic literature over the years was incomprehensible even to the general Jewish population, so its impact on non-Jews was probably nonexistent. No citations of Rabbinic Jews exist before the twelfth century (Yamauchi, 2004, 25). Aaron concludes that at present, no such document exists demonstrating, a Christian or Islamic adherences of the Jewish exegesis on the curse of Ham/Canaan (1995, 752). On the involvement of Jews in the African slave trade, Eli Faber, concludes from a study of the primary sources that Jewish participation was minimal (Faber 1998, 76).

The Curse of Ham among Muslims:

The story of Noah in the Qur'an (11.36-48) does not refer to Ham unless he is the unnamed son who did not enter the ark and perished on the mountaintop (Yamauchi 2004, 26). According to Bernard Lewis, some Muslims developed the concept of the curse of Ham to justify their enslavement of the blacks "The slaves of the Arabs were not Canaanites but blacks, so the curse was transferred to them, and blackness added to servitude as part of the

hereditary burden (Lewis 1990, 55). By the eighth and ninth centuries, Arab writers continued to invoke the biblical curse of Canaan to explain why the sons of Ham had been blackened and degraded to the status of natural slaves as punishment for their ancestors' sin (Davis 1944, 42). And by the tenth century the curse of Ham had been modified to exempt Egypt and Berbers (Evans 1980, 33).

After the crusades, sugar cane previously of the Muslims became popular among the Europeans, and since it was labour-intensive, slaves were needed to lower the cost of production. Lewis expanded further that as cultivation of sugar and cotton spread from Spain and the Atlantic Islands, to America, the myth of the curse of Ham was adopted by Christian defenders of slavery (Lewis 1990, 125).

The Curse of Ham among the Europeans:

A disjointed version of the curse of Ham was reported by a mid-fifteenth century, Portuguese' secretary to Prince Henry, "that these blacks were moors like the other slaves; following the flood story, Noah laid a curse upon his son Cain (in such a manner), cursing him in this way that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world" (Allen 1949, 119). The Renaissance writers did not believe in the curse of Ham. According to Allen "Early theologians had held that Ham was turned black because of his impiety, but they were quite aware that not all Ham's descendants were black, moreover, they were far more eager to discover a scientific explanation of the Negroid type than to accept miracles (1949, 119). By the fourteenth century German scholar Johan Boemus stated that all the civilized people of the world descended from Shem and Japheth, while the Barbarous people came from Ham. Hanneman, a Lutheran writer declared in 1677 that all people with black skin including Africans, Indians and Malays were the children of Ham and were condemned to slavery for a thousand generations (Frederickson 1981, 10).

The Curse of Ham Among Americans:

The earliest use of the curse of Ham to justify slavery in America dates back to the fifteenth century (Yamauchi 2004, 28). Peterson, Thomas identifies numerous writers who reflected various versions of the Hamitic myth. The most influential was Josiah Priest (1978, 104). According to Fox-Genovese and E. Genovese, it took a northern clergy Josiah priest to establish a fantastic rereading of the curse of Ham that confused the colour of African skin with their purported sexual excesses, justifying slavery (Fox 1987, 211-233). But Stephen Haynes opposing the Genoveses asserts:

> By the 1830s - when the American antislavery movement became organized, vocal and aggressive - the scriptural defence of slavery had evolved into the most elaborate and systematic statement of the proslavery theory, Noah's curse had become a stock weapon in the arsenal of slavery's apologists, and references to Genesis 9 appeared prominently in their publications (Haynes 2002, 246).

The New Hamitic Hypothesis:

In the early 19th century a counter hypothesis arose with the recognition that Egypt (Mizraim) was descended from Ham. According to Sanders "so it came to pass that the Egyptians

emerged as Hamites, Caucasoid, uncursed and capable of high civilization (sanders 1969, 527). In later years the great Zimbabwe Ruins "were discovered in southern Rhodesia by Karl Mauch a German geologist who ascribed them to Solomon. Others attributed them to settlers from India. Other scholars under the influence of the Hamitic hypothesis attributed it to newcomers from the north rather than the indigenous Bantu peoples. The influence of Hamitic hypothesis influenced the Belgians to favour the fairer and taller Tutsi over the darker Hutu, which has brought a deadly enmity, between the Tutsi and Hutus today. (Swanson 2001, 291).

The Curse of Ham in South Africa:

Although the apartheid policy dominated South Africa, the curse of Ham did not play a vital role in its development instead, appeal was made to verses like Deuteronomy 32:8 "When the most high gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided all mankind, he set up boundaries for the peoples according to the numbers of sons of Israel" (NIV). Also, Acts 17:26 "From one single stock he not only created the whole human race so that they could occupy the entire earth, but he decreed how long each nation should flourish and what the boundaries of its territory should be" (JB). So the apartheid group cited the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11 as a warning against humanity's sinful attempt to combine various groups of the human race (Yamauchi 2004 30-31).

The Curse of Ham Among the Mormons:

According to history by the 1830s Joseph Smith purchased four ancient Egyptian Mummies and papyri which he later transferred and published as the Book of Abraham. Of great significance in the book was a passage that served as the basis for denying Mormon priesthood to blacks. According to Howard a Mormon historian, " The text of the book of Abraham" (Chapter 1:21-27) suggests that Joseph Smith was making the so-called curse of Ham extend from the mere condition of servitude to the denial of the right of the priesthood to the 19th century Negro (Howard 1970, 42). Later, in 1841, Joseph Smith asserted that the curse on Ham, the alleged ancestor of black people was promoted by Noah, not simply in his drunken anger but rather calmly and deliberately (Bringhurst 1981, 86).

After the canonization of the Book of Abraham and the Pearl of the Great Prince in 1830, blacks were received into the church of the Mormons but still denied the priesthood. This move was critiqued by civil rights advocates as hindering the spread of the gospel to South America and Africa (Bringhurst 1981,89). In 1978, June 8, the church of the Mormons through their first president repealed the law that denied some status to the blacks and granted the priesthood of the Mormons to them (Bringhurst 1981, 178).

We see that over the centuries the obscure text of Genesis 9:20-27 was interpreted by the medieval Jews in prejudiced, uninformed, political, racist and dehumanized ways to explain the blackness of Africans. And the same was used by Arabs, Europeans and North Americans to justify slavery and until recently by the Mormons to exclude blacks from their priesthood.

Traditional views and interpretations of Genesis 9:20-27:

For this research, we shall consider some traditional views of interpretation of the Genesis text before us. These will include Voyeurism, Castration, Paternal incest and Maternal incest.

Voyeurism (peeping):

Proponents of this view among other scholars, both from antiquity to modern scholarship include the following: Hirst Cohen- The Drunkenness of Noah; Allen P. Ross- The Curse of Canaan; Victor P. Hamilton- The Book of Genesis (NICOT); Gordon P. Wenham – Genesis 1-11 (WBC); Joseph Blenkinsopp – The Pentateuch; Umberto Cassuto- A Commentary on the Book of Genesis; E. A Speiser – Genesis: Introduction, Translation and Notes (AB); Kenneth Matthew – Genesis 1-11:26 (NAC) and Claus Westermann –Genesis 1-11: A commentary, among others (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 27).

This view holds that Ham's sin was simply peeping or gazing at his father and nothing more. This view enjoyed wide acceptability most especially because of its conservatism by refusing to see anything in the text that is not explicit. However, gazing or seeing as portrayed in the text fails to explain the gravity of Ham's sin and the reason for the curse of Canaan. The interpreter may therefore have to assume an existing taboo against the accidental sight of a naked parent that is never attested in biblical or ancient Near Eastern literature (Wold 1998, 67).

Castration View:

This traditional rabbinic view that Ham castrated Noah arose as an attempt to address the shortfalls of the Voyeuristic interpretation. Bergsma and Hahn demonstrate this by citing b. Sanh. 70a thus:

> And Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his younger son had done to him. Rab and Samuel (differ on this verse), one maintaining; he (Ham) castrated Noah. While the other maintained that Noah was sexually abused. (The former reasons) Since he cursed him by his fourth son he must have injured him concerning a fourth son. (And the lather) draws analogy between "and he saw" written twice; here it is written And Ham the father of Canaan saw the nakedness of his father; whilst elsewhere it is written; And when Shechem the son of Hamor saw her (he took her and lay with her and defiled her). Now on the view that he emasculated him, it is right that he cursed him by his fourth son. But on the view that he abused him, why did he curse his fourth son? He should have cursed Ham, himself. Both indignities were perpetrated (2005, 28)

From the above, we see two rabbis grappling over the text. A case of a son castrating his father as an effort to seize his parental authority is attested from the ancient Near East to support the castration view (Graves and Patai 2014, 122). Rab's view of castration therefore has a possible motivation for Ham's sin and explains why Noah cursed Canaan the fourth son, because Ham deprived him of a fourth son, Even though the text itself does not mention or suggest castration.

Paternal Incest:

The alternative view held by Samuel that Ham abused Noah sexually has gained much support in recent scholarship. Though they came from divergent theological and methodological

camps one thing is common to them all – that Ham's act is more than simply "seeing" in the text of Genesis 9:20-27 (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 28). Proponents of this view include: Robert J. Gagnon- The Bible and Homosexual Practice; Anthony Phillips – Uncovering the Father's Skirt; Steinmetz – Vineyard; Martti Nissinen –Homoeroticism in the Bible World; World- out of Order; Daniel Kunnin – The logic of incest; Robertson Palmer – Current critical questions concerning the curse of Ham; W.E. Forrest, Ellen van Wolde and Susan Niditch among others (Bergsma and Hahn, 2005, 29). Robert Gagnon and other scholars have pointed out that the description of the text "Noah realizing what his youngest son had done to him" suggests some action more than passive viewing. It rather suggests an action or deed in which Noah was the recipient or victim (Gagnon 2001, 64).

Leviticus 20:17 equates the phrase "to see the nakedness of the father" and "to uncover nakedness" – if a man takes his sister … And sees her nakedness it is a disgrace… He has uncovered his sister's nakedness (NRSV). The phrase "uncover nakedness is understood as sexual intercourse in the holiness code (Lev 18:6; NRSV). The same description occurs in Ezekiel 16:36-37; and 22:10-18, 29; suggesting sexual promiscuity and sexual violence. This indicates that Ham's act was more than just seeing (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 30).

Other clues also arise from the text. Wine is intimately connected to sex in biblical and ancient Near East literature. Wine and drunkenness are linked to the case of Lot with his daughters (Gen19:30-38). The Song of Songs is full of images connecting wine and intercourse (Song of Songs 8:2). Wine played a role in the case of David with Uriah the Hittite (2Sam 11) (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 30). while Hirst Cohen suggests that Noah's uncovering himself carries erotic overtones, (1974, 17); Stainmetz maintains that just as seeing nakedness is more than seeing, uncovering is more than uncovering (1994, 199).

Proponents of the paternal incest theory believe that their view offers a possible motivation for Ham's deed. By humiliating his father, Ham may have hoped to usurp his father's authority, thereby displacing his older brothers in the family hierarchy. The text according to Nissinen, speaks not about Ham's homosexual orientation but of his hunger for power. This explains why he informed his brothers of what he had done immediately (1998, 53).

Objections to the paternal incest theory can be seen in Ham's brother's action of covering their father back and not daring to look at him even once. This supports literal "seeing". In support of the theory the erotic imagery of the text, the idiomatic meaning of "To see nakedness" and other parallels in the Pentateuch and the nature of Ham's deed as a familial –political power play all seem to support paternal incest (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 34). However, to maintain absolutely that Ham, merely gazed at Noah is to turn a deaf ear to the other clues and overtones in the narrative.

The Maternal Incest Theory:

Most of the arguments for paternal incest may apply to maternal incest. Leviticus 18:7-8 defines the father's nakedness as your mother's nakedness; "you shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother, she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness, you shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is the nakedness of your father" (NRSV).

In the same way, Lev 18:14, 16; 20:11, 30, 21 all refer to the nakedness of a woman as the nakedness of her husband; Deut 23:1 and 27:20 all describe intercourse with one father's wife as uncovering the father's skirt (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 34). Thus if it is taken that the "seeing of his father's nakedness" should imply more than mere gazing, then it follows that Ham must have had intercourse with Noah's wife (possibly his mother). This is supported by the imagery of the vineyard and wine which is associated only with heterosexual intercourse in the Bible. Whether in the story of Lot and his daughters, the David-Uriah-Bathsheba story or the Song of Songs (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 35).

In the pericope following our text (Gen 9:1-17) God had commanded Noah and his sons to multiply and be fruitful, And Gen 9:19 suggests; that through Noah and his sons the whole earth was peopled. Gen 9:18 and 22 stress the role of Ham as progenitor of Canaan, but Noah and Ham cannot procreate in a homosexual relationship, so it is more reasonable to understand the text Noah drank and uncovered himself to procreate, but Ham intervened and had intercourse with his father's wife his mother (Bergsma and Hahn 2005, 35). If this is true then Canaan is the fruit of that Union. This then answers our question as to why Canaan was cursed but not Ham who committed the offence. Also why Ham is repeatedly referred to as the father of Canaan.

The paternal incest view cannot explain related passages like Gen 6:1-4 and Gen 19:30-38 concerning the production of wicked offspring through illicit sexual union. Gen 9:20-27 and 19:30-38 are both concerned with repopulating the earth after the great flood disaster and offer an explanation of the low state of Israel's traditional enemies (Canaan, Moab and Ammon) as products of parent-child incest (Son-Mother and father-daughters). If it is correct that Ham intended to usurp his father's authority it is more convincing to do that through the maternal incest. Why would intercourse with the father serve to acquire his authority? Evidence however abounds for usurping the father's authority through sleeping with one's father's wives. See the case of Absalom sleeping with his father David's concubines (2 Sam 15:20-23); Reuben's relation with Bilhah (Gen 35:23; 49:3-4); David's acquisition of Saul's concubines (2 Sam 12:8); and Adonijah's attempt to acquire David's wife Abishag 2 Kgs 2:13-25 (Levenson and Halpern 1980, 508).

With all considerations, if we hold to the maternal incest view which is most likely then, we can read the passage as follows: Noah got drunk and uncovered himself in his tent preparatory for intercourse, but he was incapacitated by his drunkenness, Ham intervenes and sees his father's nakedness by having relation with his father's wife, goes out gossiping about it to his brothers claiming to grasp at familial power; the brothers, in turn, cover the nakedness of their father. Noah awakes, curses that fruit of the union- Canaan and blesses Shem and Japheth for their piety. The reactions of the two brothers, however, show the weakness of the maternal theory. The passage portrays Noah's nakedness as literal.

From the above, we see that the voyeurism interpretations which understand Ham's deed fail to explain the gravity of Ham's sin and the course of Canaan. The castration view lacks textual support. While the paternal incest with all its good evidence does not answer why Canaan would be cursed. The maternal incest is more convincing because it answers the questions of the gravity of Ham's sin, why Canaan was cursed instead of his father; the question of Ham's

motivation for committing the offence, the repetition of "Ham the father of Canaan" and the relationship of the text with other biblical and ancient near East documents.

Alternative View:

Having examined the four views above voyeurism, castration, paternal and maternal incest; an alternative view is possible. The curse did not fall on Ham the perpetrator of the "seeing" but on his youngest of the four sons who were Cush, Egypt and Phut Canaan (Gen 10:6). Noah may have detected in Canaan the evil traits he had seen in Ham, Canaan's father. Canaan therefore, received the curse for walking in his father's footsteps. The curse may also have been a prophetic oracle as asserted by Keil and Delitzsch: Noah through the spirit and power of God with whom he walked, discerned in the moral nature of his sons, and the different tendencies which they already displayed …. and uttered words of blessing and of curse, which were prophetic of the history of the tribes that descended from them (Keil ad Delitzsch 1949, 155). Such curses and blessings could only be fulfilled by God if it was his will. Perhaps this curse was directed to the Canaanites who were the future enemies of Israel. The Canaanites were known to be corrupt (Gen 13, 15, 18, 19 and 38). Noah's utterance therefore became a premise and the orders to drive them out of the land.

Implications of Ham's Crime and The Course of Canaan for The Christian In Africa:

The Genesis 9:20-27 text should be understood in the context of the command to honour one's parent (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16), and the prohibition of Lev 18:7-8. Perhaps this prohibition which protects the dignity and mystery of the parent is paralleled to that of Gen 2:17 which prohibits the tree of knowledge; both of which may reflect at the same time, a concrete sexual agenda and also, be concerned with the much broader implications of the mystery of life.

The text is not overly concerned about the specific offence of Canaan. It is more concerned with the far-reaching political and theological implications of the act. The focus is on the blessing of Shem, Japheth and the corresponding curse on Canaan. This is an attempt to root in pre-history the power relations between Israel and Canaan. Political relations are here determined by God's power to bless and to curse.

This is an early form of the same approach which subsequently fixes the relation between Isaac – Ishmael, Jacob-Esau and Ephraim Manasseh (Brueggemann 1982, 90). Beyond political foundation, the prohibitions of sexual violation and indignity embody a rejection of Canaanite ways of life. Israel understands that life is premised on grace and not on the manipulation of powers of life and wellbeing. Thus Canaan may be understood not as an ethnic grouping but as a characterization of all those who practice other ways of life rather than obeying the sovereignty and trusting the graciousness of Yahweh (Brueggeman 1982, 90-91).

Noah pronounced the course on Canaan instead of Ham, in the same way, he directed his blessing to Yahweh instead of Shem "Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem and let Canaan be his servant (Gen 9:26), by this the narrator was subordinating the human actors to the divine actor. The use of God's covenant name suggests that Shem the ancestor of Israel was already in a covenant relationship with the Lord and this is the highest blessing anyone can experience.

In the past, some people premised their claim on the curse of Canaan to justify enslaving the blacks, a standpoint criticized as an ideologically driven misconception. Martin Luther King

Jr. calls it blasphemy (Paul's letter, 2013). This is standing against everything that the Christian religion represents. Genesis 9, however, does not say Ham was black; this notion came to the fore through folk etymology. It was maintained that the curse of Ham only applied to his youngest son Canaan, who migrated to sub-Saharan Africa (Bruce 1790, 376). It is not recorded in scripture that Noah's curse meant the blackness of Ham and his posterity. He was to serve as a servant of servants. This came to pass when the Israelites subdued the Canaanites, the descendants of Ham and subjected them to their land during the conquest of Canaan.
There is no scripture evidence that being black is a curse. Finally, Jesus Christ has removed the curse for both Hamitic and Japhethite, those who are in Christ are offspring of Abraham and heirs according to the promise. There is no inferiority of race, location or tribe; hence all are equal before God. No slave, both Jew and Gentile; Hamite or Jephtithe (Gal 3:29).

Conclusion:
In this study, we have seen the various debates and interpretations by scholars over the centuries. Some are based on ideological, misconstrued and ethnic grounds. Others have read different meanings into the text beginning with the Jewish Rabbis then followed by the Muslim scholars, the Europeans, Americans and the Mormons among others. Most of them have used the text in various ways to justify enslaving the Africans and blacks. This is the case of reading meaning into the text.
Four traditional views and interpretations of the text are perused including: Voyeurism, castration, paternal incest and maternal incest; all of which try to explain the text with their various strengths and weaknesses. It then follows that none of the above interpretations is sufficient in itself, however, they broaden our understanding of the text as it was read and understood by the original recipients; and how best we can understand and apply it today.
A better way of understanding the text could be prophetic. We may therefore ask questions did the text originally read "Ham as in (LXX) and later Canaan as receiving the curse, or did we originally have two versions of the story? Or was the curse of Noah a prophetic oracle from God? Delitzsch writes:

> Noah, through the spirit and power of God with whom he walked, discerned in the moral nature of his sons, and the different tendencies they already displayed … and uttered words of blessing and of course, which were prophetic of the history of the tribes that descended from them.

The Canaanites were a sensually depraved people; everything the pagan Canaanites did was an extrapolation of Ham's lurid sensuality. From the time Abraham entered the land, the Canaanites were there spreading corruption. The orders giving Israel was to drive out the Canaanites. Noah's oracle had prophesied the bitter fruit that everyone could now see; they were naked, shameless and uncovered (Hughes, 153). Thus if Noah's first and last Utterances (Gen.9:25-27) were considered prophetic oracles they could also explain why the curse was directed to Canaan instead of Ham the offender.
It will therefore read, that Noah having known what Ham had done to him, looked beyond the act into the future, and cursed Canaan, according to the tendencies he foresaw in him.

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