

What does Genesis 9:20-27 mean?

With Guest Dr. Thomas Jackson

WES: Welcome to the Radically Christian Bible Study podcast. I'm your host, Wes McAdams, and here we have one goal: Learn to love like Jesus. I'm so glad that you have taken the time to join us for our Bible study today. We are doing a series of podcast episodes entitled "What does this passage mean?" and we're just working our way through various passages of scripture and trying to figure out what does this passage mean? And when we ask that question, we mean what did it mean to its original audience, and how does it apply to our life today? So if there's a passage of scripture that you would like for us to discuss, you can send that to us using the "Contact Us" page at RadicallyChristian.com or you could call and leave a voicemail. We would love to play your voicemail on the podcast. The phone number that you can call is (707) 238-2216, and we would love to work through and talk about and study the passage of scripture that's on your mind and your heart.

I am so excited for today's passage. One, because it's a very interesting passage. It's one that many people have talked about and have tried to interpret over the centuries, really, and I think that you're going to gain a lot of insight from talking about and listening to this discussion of this passage. I will warn listeners that if you're listening with your kids, we may be talking about some things of a sexual nature today, so you might want to listen to this one before you allow your young ones to listen to it because it might be a little bit graphic, but sometimes that's the way scripture is. We are going to be

talking about Genesis 9, talking about the sin of Ham and the curse of Canaan, and here to talk about that passage is my friend, Dr. Thomas Jackson.

Brother Jackson, thank you so much for being with us today.

DR. JACKSON: Brother Wes, I'm happy to be here with you, man. How are you?

WES: I'm doing very well. Doing very well, even better now, having you on the podcast finally.

DR. JACKSON: I've been looking forward to it, so I'm excited that our time has come, and I'm looking forward to our journey in the passage.

WES: Me, too. Well, I told you before we started recording that I actually went and listened to the video that you recorded, and you've done several of these videos where you talk about interpreting difficult passages of the Bible, and I would encourage people to check out the videos that you've done, and I will link to this specific one on Genesis 9 because it was incredibly insightful, and I'm so excited for them to hear -- go back and watch that lesson, but also for you to hear the things that we're going to talk about today.

So I'm going to read the passage first and then we'll just -- we'll jump right into it. So it's Genesis chapter 9, starting in verse 20. It says, "Noah began to be a man of the soil and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent, and Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it on both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father. Their faces were turned backward and they did not see their father's nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he

said, 'Cursed be Canaan. A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers.' He also said, 'Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth and let him dwell in the tents of Shem and let Canaan be his servant.'"

So a lot of this passage obviously has to do with Noah's nakedness and what does that mean? So with that in mind, let's jump into the passage, but maybe even before we get specific in Genesis 9, Brother Jackson, let's talk about Genesis in general. If somebody's reading through Genesis -- and most of us have some familiarity with the book, but what should people be noticing as they read through Genesis, or as they think about Genesis, that's going to help them understand what this specific passage means?

DR. JACKSON: All right. Well, I appreciate that. And some of the things I believe, Wes, is when we're reading scripture in general, and specifically right now with Genesis, is to appreciate the distance between an Eastern culture and the culture that we live in, and -- but before we lay on top of the scriptures with our culture, appreciating the worldview of the writer, and that's going to allow us to see some things that perhaps we take for granted. And even in metaphors -- Hebrew metaphors, idioms that are not common to us, we miss that when there's not that connection. So when we're reading through, specifically right now in the book of Genesis, there are some Hebrew idioms that if you don't have appreciation for them, it's easy to make this passage mean something that the writer never intended for it to mean.

And when we're doing those kinds of things, one of the things I would encourage is -- for Bible students is there's really no substitute for close attention to the text. You know, there's no substitute for that. And we should

be trying to read the Bible in its original language, but if we're not going to do that, we need to read the Bible or that verse, those passages, from multiple translations to make sure we're getting the fuller picture and not just depend on one version to give us the entire picture.

And with that being said, the other thing I would say that we need to consider is appreciating that the Bible has its own context, and it's not our context; it's the context of the writer. You follow me? And then, you know, patterns are important. When I do Bible study, patterns are important to me. I do word studies. Word studies are important. You know, word studies help you understand what that word means, but I also believe patterns have a higher rank than just word studies. When you follow a pattern of words and how an author is using a particular word, it helps you get closer to what the author is intending as opposed to just a word study.

So when you're looking at the book of Genesis, specifically the passage we're looking at today, what's going to help us is the pattern of a phrase. And when you appreciate the pattern of the phrase, you get closer to understanding how Hebrew-speaking people, or the first audience, would have understood what the writer is saying.

WES: Yeah, I think that's so important. Just -- I don't mean to throw you a curveball here, but you brought up a really important point, I think, and that is paying attention to when an idiom might be used. And I think that that's -- that's really challenging, isn't it, to know -- because we don't know what we don't know, and so we might be unaware that an idiom is being used, and so we translate it -- or not translate it, but we interpret it in a very flat way and we just take it at its literal meaning, and its actual meaning isn't -- it wasn't intended for

it to be taken in the literal way.

DR. JACKSON: Absolutely.

WES: We say -- I always use "raining cats and dogs." We don't mean it's raining cats and dogs, and if you're familiar with that idiom, then you know what it is, but if you're not, you might be completely confused. So if you're reading scripture, how do you know, or what might be some indications, what might be some clues that an idiom might be used here, or this may not -- I might not should be taking this in a just flat, literal way?

DR. JACKSON: Some of it is when the language -- if a text seems to be complex and then there's language thrown in that seems not to fit, you're probably reading an idiomatic expression. For example, when you see the phrase "to expose the feet of somebody," that phrase is a Hebrew idiom, which actually is a reference to sexual genitals. But we won't express "exposing the feet" as a sexual connotation; we just think it means exposing the feet. But you can trace that pattern of exposing the feet -- you know, Israel is exposed as a prostitute to say she "exposed her feet" to any come-byers. It was sexual. When Moses' wife circumcised her son, it says she threw the foreskin at his feet. It's really saying she touched his genitals. But, see, those are idioms that we won't see because of the disconnect between the language and the culture. So if something is somewhat complex, but then the language or the response seems to be incompatible to what's going on in the narrative, we're probably reading an idiom.

WES: And that's really -- I'm so glad that you pointed out about the importance or the helpfulness of reading from multiple translations. And sometimes we tend to think -- I grew up thinking that the more literal a

translation, the better the translation, and sometimes there's some truth to that. But at other times, a version or a translation that's more of a paraphrase can be helpful in this area because it can expose the actual meaning of a phrase rather than the literal translation of a phrase. And as a reader, as a Christian who's trying to follow the will of God, sometimes the meaning is more important than what it literally says because, as you said, we're in a different culture.

DR. JACKSON: That's exactly right. And I agree with you; some dynamic translations help us. In the translation work, they will translate things that are live metaphors that still exist, or they will translate it as a dead metaphor, that it existed at that time but now it's changed meaning, and we need to know the difference. And some of your dynamic translations, New Living Translation, those kind of things, will help you appreciate the author's intentional meaning in their culture. Because again, like you said, sometimes if I translate it literally, I can get the literal translation, but I don't know what it literally means, no pun intended. But, you know, I can have word for word, but if I don't have the context or the language, I still won't know what it means. It would be like you and I -- if you're from a different culture, and I were to say, "The Cowboys are going to go to the frozen tundra and beat up the cheeseheads." Now, if you're from this culture and if you're a sports fan, you would know I'm talking about the Dallas Cowboys going to Green Bay to have a match with the Green Bay Packers. I'm talking NFL football even though I never mentioned football at all. But someone in China could have a literal translation of that and still not know that I'm talking sports.

WES: Yeah. I brought up one time the idea of raining cats and dogs, and a Spanish speaker, after the service, said that in the country they came from --

and I forget which country it was or if this is common in Latin America, but they said that, literally translated, the way they use a similar idiom is "It's raining a big stick." And of course that wouldn't make any sense to us if we translate that literally, nor would the phrase "raining cats and dogs" make sense to them if we translated it literally. So it would be more helpful, if somebody was translating from English to Spanish and trying to communicate the same idea, to translate the phrase "It's raining cats and dogs" to "It's raining a big stick," and they would understand what that idiom meant because it moved to their culture and something that would be roughly equivalent.

DR. JACKSON: And you're getting closer to the author's intent when you do that.

WES: Yeah, yeah, exactly. So as we sort of narrow our focus here -- and I think that setting of the stage is really important because it really takes -- it takes not only translators, but it takes commentators and it takes scholars for all of us to better understand this culture and try to bridge that gap between the 21st-century American mind and the thousands-of-years-ago Hebrew mind and the original audience. So as we sort of narrow our focus to this specific story about Noah and his sons, what should we notice here in this particular passage?

DR. JACKSON: About the sons or what's going on in the passage?

WES: Sure, sure, yeah. In order to kind of understand it, what should we be observing as we read this story?

DR. JACKSON: Yeah, a couple of things. We're going to look at language, but some of the problematics that have come with it is how we've translated it from a westernized culture, and I want us to try to divorce our worldview from perhaps what the Hebrew language or the Hebrew-speaking people understood,

and there are a couple of things we just need to rule out about the passage on what it's not saying in order to help us focus in on what it could be saying.

And a couple of those things, Wes, is this passage is not about racism. You know, there's been a circle of thought that this is a passage that justifies slavery. This passage is not about -- you know, there are a couple of interpretations that have been given to this passage, and a lot of it has to do, again, with our interpretation of scripture from a westernized world separating the Hebrew idioms. And so to help us appreciate that, some of the things that we've considered to be interpretive of this is voyeurism, castration, or even paternal incest. But when we walk through the passage, what we're going to see is those really don't fit the narrative as a good interpretation. They're very popular, but it doesn't really fit if we're going to be honest with the passage. You know, voyeurism doesn't explain why Canaan is cursed. Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah.

DR. JACKSON: You know, Canaan is Ham's son. So if it was voyeurism, you know, why is Canaan cursed? So that really doesn't make a lot of sense for that.

WES: Sorry to interrupt you for just a second, but that really would be the literal and flat reading of the text, because if we just read it and we weren't familiar with any sort of idiom from a Hebrew perspective, we would just think, "Oh, well, Ham walked into the tent, saw his father naked, looked at him" -- I've heard people say, well, maybe he laughed at him or he was making fun of him -- but he was gawking at his father's nakedness, and then he walked out and told his brothers. And then when Noah wakes up, he finds out. "Oh,

you looked at me while I was naked," and so he curses -- and as you said, he curses his son, which, to your point, wouldn't connect those things. But that would be the literal or flat reading of it and not allowing for any idiomatic phrases.

DR. JACKSON: Absolutely. And that's a great observation. Some have believed -- have taken the approach that Ham castrated his father to avoid them having a fourth son. You know, he had the three boys, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and he didn't want to have a fourth son because then you have to share, you know, the inheritance. And some believe, out of selfishness and greed, that he castrated him. But it's interesting that Noah actually curses Ham's fourth son. Canaan is Ham's fourth son, right? And it's believed that Canaan is cursed in revenge of Noah being castrated, but when you understand these phrases that we're going to look at, that's not going to line up, as well, either, in the big picture.

WES: That was the first time that I had heard that, when I listened to your lesson on this text.

DR. JACKSON: Is that right?

WES: I had never heard the castration interpretation. But, again, I think that, going back to the idea of an idiom, that certainly would be an idiomatic way of reading it, but if that interpretation isn't supported by the rest of the way that that phrase is used throughout scripture -- because there's nothing in the text that would literally point to a castration, and so a person who was making that interpretation, they would be interpreting it in a figurative sort of way, but there's no support to that way of using the phrase or the idea of "exposing nakedness" to mean castration, and so -- yeah. But it is interesting that we

sometimes use things like "the fourth son" and "fourth son" to try to tie those two things together, but I agree with you; I don't think that that's supportive, but I had never heard that interpretation.

DR. JACKSON: Okay. Well, I'm sure you've heard the interpretation of the homosexual component that some have concluded, that, well, "uncovering Noah's nakedness" is Ham had homosexual activity with his own father. And that's actually an interpretation that's very common among academia, that this is a violation, you know, homosexual, that his son had sex with his father, and as a result, you know, he curses his son. But if that be the case -- you know, keep in mind that the brothers, when they became aware of whatever happened, they went in to cover this. They didn't want to see it. They went to cover it. That doesn't hold well when we look at the passage. It's a very popular interpretation, but what's really going to help us, Wes, is understanding that phrase "to see someone's nakedness" or "to uncover their nakedness." When we understand that from a Hebrew expression, I believe the passage begins to unfold itself. And we just have to do that through patterns and tracing the patterns of that phrase through other passages to help us understand how a writer and how a Hebrew-understanding audience would have understood that phrase.

I just want to take a short break from our Bible study to tell you that if you are enjoying this discussion, you might also enjoy my book "Beyond the Verse." You can find the audio version of the book at RadicallyChristian.com/audible. And if you're not already an audible subscriber, you can actually get my book for free when you sign up for a free trial, so go to RadicallyChristian.com/audible.

Now back to the Bible study.

WES: Yeah. And I think that it is helpful to -- and I think you'll walk us through this and we'll see this as we continue to go and look at the way that that phrase is used. I think that it's accurate to say that the homosexual violation of Noah is on the right track in that they're beginning to see, through the way that that phrase is used throughout scripture, that there is something sexual that's happening here, that it isn't just -- as you said in the beginning, it's not just voyeurism; it's not just that Ham happened to see his father naked and he looked at him or he laughed at him. There's something more happening here. So I think that that popular interpretation of realizing that something sexual has happened here is on the right track, but I agree with you. I think that there's more to it, and it really does become clear as you look at some of the other passages. So let's kind of walk through that and how can we better understand what that phrase "uncover the nakedness" is referring to.

DR. JACKSON: Okay. So right at the top -- and then there's a passage I need to read, if that's okay.

WES: Yeah.

DR. JACKSON: Right at the top is the Hebrew euphemism "to see the nakedness" or "to uncover someone's nakedness" is the euphemism of sexual intercourse or sexual contact, so that is true; that has some sexual activity involved. So as we look at it, if we can equate "seeing nakedness" is the same as "uncovering nakedness," that's important. "Seeing nakedness" is the same as "uncovering nakedness," and the passage I would like to read is Leviticus 20:17-21. Is that all right?

WES: Yeah.

DR. JACKSON: This is ESV. It says, "If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness" -- there's that phrase -- "and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people." Watch this. "He has uncovered his sister's nakedness and he shall bear his iniquity." So the idea is when you see someone's nakedness is also the same as uncovering their nakedness. Verse 18, he says, "If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness" -- see, if he lays with her and uncovers her nakedness, "he has made naked her fountain and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people. You shall not uncover," verse 19, "the nakedness of your mother's sister or your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's relative." It's getting ready to happen. "They shall bear their iniquity. If a man lies" -- here it is. "If a man lies with his uncle's wife" -- that's so important. "If a man lies," or sleeps with, "his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness." You see that? The man has slept with his uncle's wife, but it's referred to as "uncovering his uncle's nakedness," and "they shall bear their sin. They shall die childless." And then verse 21 says, "If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness." Now, there's no sexual activity between the man and his brother. The man has slept with his brother's wife, and that's referred to as that man has "uncovered his brother's nakedness."

WES: When you said this in your lesson on this text, it was like a light-bulb moment. I don't know that I had ever heard this connected, but it makes perfect sense what -- the way that you're connecting these two texts and the

way that this -- the meaning, the interpretation -- I think the correct interpretation of this Hebrew idiom has come to light when you compare it with Leviticus 20.

DR. JACKSON: Yeah. And it's been in the Bible forever.

WES: Right.

DR. JACKSON: I didn't put it in there. It's been in there for a long time. And then if you were to tie that -- because this is not -- that phrase is repetitive. If you were to tie that to Leviticus 18:6-10, you will see it gets more specific. You follow me? Verse 7 says, "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 your father's nakedness."

All right. So if we're talking nakedness -- to see someone's nakedness or to uncover someone's nakedness is equivalent to sexual involvement, the passage here, verse 8, says, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness" -- to see your father's nakedness has not a lot to do with sexual intercourse with your father, right? Verse 9 will say, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or another house. You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own." Leviticus 20 and Leviticus 18 is about sexual laws. Here are things you just don't do. And what you don't do, in all those passages, is to uncover somebody's nakedness, and to uncover somebody's nakedness or to see someone's nakedness is when you violate that person with somebody else.

Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah, it makes perfect sense. And I think that -- to be clear, I think what you're saying and what the text is saying -- it's not to say that same-sex homosexual relations are not condemned by the law because they were, but that's -- it's not spoken of in those terms. That sort of same-sex violation is not spoken of this way. This way of speaking about sexual immorality is about violating either -- a man violating a woman or violating a man by sleeping with that man's wife, especially as it pertains to relatives. And it's amazing how it's in the exact same context, that we're talking about a son or a nephew or a brother who is violating his male relative by having sexual relations with that person's wife, and it's said in exactly the same way that our story in Genesis 9 lays it out.

DR. JACKSON: Exactly. Exactly. And when you talk about same-sex, you know, it's many times led with the phrase of things being unnatural. These sexual laws in Leviticus, he's talking about, okay, the sexual behavior is natural, but there are certain people you shouldn't be engaged with sexually because it exposes someone's nakedness, right? Which is really interesting to me. So that pattern -- and we could keep going through that pattern, but that pattern is extremely important if we're going to understand Genesis 9.

WES: So to be really clear -- and I think that we wouldn't even have to say the conclusion. I think that just reading those things, if we get to this point in the study, I think that everybody is starting to put the pieces together. But just to be clear to everyone, what do you believe happened in a literal sense with Ham?

DR. JACKSON: Okay. Let's rule out a couple of things and then let's leave

the last thing on the table and see what it is. So if those phrases are true, and they are, we can rule out paternal incest, that Ham had sex with his father. We ought to be able to rule that out based on how seeing someone's nakedness is a violation of that person by sleeping with that person's mate. We ought to be able to rule that out because, again, if a man lies with a woman, he exposes that man's nakedness, but he slept with the woman. If you remember Leviticus 20:18, it says "he's lying with." That's sexual relations, right? "Uncovering," sexual relations; "lying with" is sexual relations; "uncovering" is sexual relations. So when you go back and look at Leviticus 20:17-21, you're going to see that uncovering this nakedness has everything to do with another person, and it's the embarrassment or the shame that is brought upon the person.

So what really happens is Ham shames his father. So when you talk about paternal, it's not that Ham sexually violated Noah. So we can take that off, right, if we're honest to the phrase and the text. Here's an observation. Again, uncovering another man's wife is the equivalent of uncovering that man's nakedness, right? Another translation, sexual relations -- uncovering a man's nakedness is to uncover that man's wife. Another way of saying the exact same thing is the sexual relations is not with the man, it's with the man's wife. All right? So the insight would be when I uncover, when I see a man's nakedness, that's not homosexual behavior. What that is is more so forbidden heterosexual relationship. Okay? So then when we talk about that, what is the real sin that Ham committed? And based on his sin, why is Canaan cursed? So it's not voyeurism; it's not homosexual activity; it's not paternal/father incest. Uncovering Noah's nakedness is maternal incest. What Ham did, Wes, based on the phrasing, is Ham sexually violated his own mother, Noah's wife, and by

doing that, he uncovered his father's nakedness. Does that make sense?

WES: Yeah.

DR. JACKSON: And so then what you have -- even to the point when you look at Leviticus 18, the sexual laws -- if you look at verse 3, he says, "You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt" -- watch how they see Canaan -- "where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I'm about to bring you. You shall not walk in their statutes." This helps us appreciate, I believe, why Ham's brothers kind of did what they did, because the interpretation is if Ham fathers a child, now his children get to be in the line of leadership. It's almost like a usurping authority kind of thing. Follow me?

WES: Yeah.

DR. JACKSON: The same thing happened with David and Absalom. When Absalom tried to take the kingdom from his father, the adviser gave him the advice, "If you want to do this, you need to expose your father's nakedness." And what did Absalom do? He slept with one of the concubines in public, that everybody would know that his son shamed him.

So then by the time you walk through this, why is Canaan cursed, then? The text says, Genesis 9:22, "And Ham, the father of Canaan" -- see, that's interesting that the writer puts that in there, that "Ham, comma, the father of Canaan..." He lets us know very specifically that something bad happened. Why bring up Canaan? Canaan is the fourth son. Why not bring up the other boys? And see, this is one of those things we were talking about earlier. If you read too fast, you miss it. Canaan is the fourth son. Why not mention the other three? Because Canaan is tied to the sin. Verse 22 says, "And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside.

He went and told them what he had done." Observation: Exposing a man's nakedness is to have sexual relations with that man's spouse. What we have --

WES: Specifically -- sorry to interrupt you. And specifically, as you said before, just like Absalom did to David, it's not just sleeping with another man's -- and we have a hard time, as you've been pointing out, understanding this because it's so much different in our culture. If a man slept with his mother, that would be something that would be done -- you know, something that we would -- even the culture would look at as a perversion, as something that was wrong and wicked and something that somebody would do behind closed doors, and they wouldn't want anybody to know about it. But this is something that Ham comes out and brags about because exposing a man's nakedness is to humiliate him on purpose, to sleep with his wife on purpose so that you can show your dominance over him. And so I think that this interpretation is exactly right and is in keeping with the sort of sexual immorality and sexual dominance and using sexuality as a way to humiliate and dominate other people that, unfortunately, was part of pagan culture, was part of ancient culture, and, unfortunately, was part of the biblical story, as well.

DR. JACKSON: That's very insightful. That is very insightful, which brings us to that crux. If all that be true about the phrases, the reason Canaan is cursed, being the fourth son, Canaan is the result of that maternal incest that Ham had with his mother, Noah's wife. That when Ham sleeps with his mother, he exposes the nakedness of his father based on the -- and what happens, if Canaan is given the right, then Canaan becomes a new dynasty and Ham will reign. So it's like taking the leadership from his father. So to prevent

that, Noah says, "Cursed be Canaan. Canaan will not reign." He says we're not going to give the dynasty over to this relationship that should not have happened. In fact, not only is he cursed, his descendants shall be servants of Japheth and Shem. You follow me?

WES: Yeah. And I think that -- as I heard you give this lesson, it made me think about just 10 chapters later we have the story about Lot and his daughters and how they took advantage of their father and how the Moabites and the Ammonites came from that sexual immorality, and that shines some light on this story in that the Canaanites came from this sexual immorality. And so you have these different family trees that came from this sort of behavior that the law itself is exposing as wicked and wrong and the way of the world and not the way of God's people. And so it makes perfect sense that the law that Genesis is a part of would give us these stories, give Israel these stories as they go into the promised land to remember this is the way -- as you said, this is the way of the Canaanites; this is the way of the Amorites. This is the way of the Ammonites and the Moabites. This is the way of these people; this is not the way you are supposed to live. This is not the way God's people are supposed to behave.

DR. JACKSON: Absolutely. And that's a good tie-in, you know, with the daughters of Lot. And even those nations started from a sexual impropriety, started from something that shouldn't have happened, and those nations grew to be known for sexual manipulation. You know, the Moabites are known for sexually enticing the Israelites, so much so they wanted to sexually entice them and then wanted to have Balaam cast a curse on them. It's the sexual laws that says there's some things in a heterosexual relationship -- there are some that

just should not happen, and when they do, things like this are born.

WES: Let me ask you, as we sort of try to wrap this up just a little bit -- because my mind goes in about a dozen different directions. If we read the text this way -- and I completely agree and I think this is in keeping with the big picture of Genesis -- there are some of the details that I'm sure that people are thinking, because this is probably new information to a lot of people, as it was to me. If we read it this way, and we read things like Noah got drunk and he lay -- it says in verse 21, he "lay uncovered in his tent" -- if this is about Ham taking advantage of his mother and having a child through that relationship, then what does Noah laying uncovered in his tent, or even the brothers backing in and covering over what has happened -- how do we make sense of those details as part of the story?

DR. JACKSON: Yeah. Part of it is Genesis is not read -- should not be read like chronology. It is to tell the story, and here's something that's different than the way that we read. Their worldview is not focused on chronology as much as we are. You know, we want to know how it happened, when it happened, and what was going on. The intent is to tell you the story. Chronos, or time, is not the focus for the Hebrew culture. I'll give you a case in point. Earlier in Genesis, Genesis 1, you have the creation of man, right? And -- but then in Genesis 2 -- well, in Genesis 1 you have the creation of man, and it says, "He created both male and female." That's Genesis 1. But if you go a chapter over in Genesis 2, then you only have the man, and then the garden, and then he puts the man in the garden and then he fashions the woman. Well, if you read that chronology, she was fashioned in Genesis 1, but she wasn't. So it's not about chronology; it's about the story. Now, I'm not trying to confuse

you there.

WES: No, I think that's a really good way to put it. And correct me if I'm wrong. It sounds like maybe what you're saying -- like if we read verse 21 with that in mind, we might read it to say that Noah drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent, and then sort of a colon after that, as it were, as if to say "and here's how that story went, that Noah, he got drunk, and he was humiliated, and here's how he was humiliated." So is that sort of the way we might interpret that?

DR. JACKSON: It is. Because there's a -- in his nakedness is a time span. Because Canaan -- you know, by this time Canaan is born and he's grown. That didn't happen in two verses. Time has gone by, right? See, Ms. Noah had to carry the baby before he's cursed, so time has gone by. Do you follow me? The brothers covered the nakedness, but then the aftermath is time, and we can't read one verse and go to the next verse, and here's what happened. No more, Wes, is -- in Genesis 4, when you have the children -- you know, you have Canaan, then the next -- I mean, Cain, and the next verse you get Abel, and the next verse they're grown. But time passed to the point where they were old enough to want to offer sacrifices. But when you eliminate all that time, you misread the story. And the writer is not giving it to us to give us the details of the time; he's writing us to tell us the story.

WES: And I think that there's so many -- you talked in the beginning about the patterns that we see in scripture, and there's amazing -- it's amazing how many patterns there are repeated between the fall and this post-flood event and how Noah is almost this second Adam. And just like with Adam, now there's another sin and now there's, again, nakedness and there's a covering over of the

nakedness.

And so picking up on those themes and then seeing how those themes and those patterns play out, not just in these two stories but throughout scripture, of the humiliation of man through sin and then the covering over of that. Because I assume that the alternative to the brothers covering over Noah's impropriety -- or not necessarily Noah's impropriety, but his humiliation and his nakedness would be what Jerusalem did when Absalom slept with David's concubines on the roof of the palace and exposed the nakedness of David. Jerusalem didn't turn away from Absalom. They respected him, and they said, "Well, I guess Absalom is in charge now because he's exposed his father's nakedness. He's dominated his father, so I guess he's in charge now." And Shem and Japheth didn't do that. They looked away and they covered over their father's nakedness. Is that how we should sort of interpret what they did?

DR. JACKSON: That's a great observation. That's a great observation. I think you said it very plainly. That's a great observation.

WES: I appreciate that, Brother. How would we apply some of this to -- I mean, again, if we just read this flatly and we were just, "Well, this is about getting drunk and making a mess of your life because you got drunk," and I guess -- you know, I guess there's worse things you could take away from it, but I think if we see this very beautiful nuanced -- and when I say "beautiful," I mean complicated, horrible, but also exposing something about humanity and theology and God and sin and righteousness. What can we take away from this interpretation of the text and say this shows me something about myself or about God or about how I should live?

DR. JACKSON: Yeah. One of the main disconnects is the culture in which

produces the Bible is based on an honor/shame culture. This is about honor and shame. And we have a shame culture here, too, but it's different. You know, we're actually more individualistic, and often -- I'm not faulting what we do, but often when we're reading, sometimes -- I'm going to stereotype -- we read to find the sin, the grace, the reconciliation, the right/wrong of a story to show how God showed up to redeem, and we miss reading the narratives to look at real life. And when we look at real life, you see the honor and the shame, the hurt, the disappointment of what life would have been like when these families are going through this. When we can see that from their perspective, I think it brings insight to us in our culture that, one, these are real people, had real struggles, and rather than being quick to draw a conclusion or to judge it, see it for real life. See the life story in that even through the brokenness, the honor and the shame, God is never far away to heal any of that. But we don't need to read it just for the right and the wrong; we need to read it to see how people did life.

WES: Yeah, I think that's so important. And I think that it does -- it shows us the brokenness of the world. It shows us the brokenness of all humanity. It shows us our own brokenness. It shows us what real life is and what real life is like and the consequences of living and doing what's right in our own eyes as opposed to following the will of God.

DR. JACKSON: Absolutely.

WES: Well, Brother, thank you so much for shining some light on this and bringing this greater context and greater appreciation for the nuances and the beauty of scripture and the brokenness of humanity, which exposes the beauty of the grace of God. So thank you, Brother, for this and for all you're doing.

DR. JACKSON: Brother Wes, it's been a pleasure for me. I'm glad I could do it. I'm glad we got the time to do this together. Let's see what the schedules look like.

WES: Sounds great. Thank you, Brother.

DR. JACKSON: You owe me lunch.

WES: Sounds great.

Thank you so much for being part of the Radically Christian Bible Study Podcast today. We hope that you've enjoyed this episode. I want to give a special thanks to Travis Pauley and to our McDermott Road church family for making this podcast possible. As always, we love you, God loves you, and we hope that you have a wonderful day.