Emotions and Ideology in the Noah-Ham Conflict (Genesis 9:24–27): A Narrative Clue for Noah's Characterization

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Abstract

Little attention has been given to emotions and ideology apparent in the curse narrative in Genesis 9:20-27. This study identifies and shows the significance of emotions and ideology in the Noah-Ham conflict. Based on the emotions and ideology depicted in the text, the study posits that the narrator is painting Noah in a more negative light than has been highlighted in scholarship. Based on a familial perspective, the study combines the literary critical approach and discourse analysis to identify the narrator's clues to emotions and ideology that characterize Noah negatively. The study confines itself to the contextual and linguistic clues in this passage, focusing on the narrator's points of view in characterizing Noah. By and large, the prevailing interpretation excuses Noah from any fault in the family conflict – at least not in the cursing act itself. However, the emotional texture attested in the curse narrative begins to question the legitimacy of Noah's pronouncements upon Canaan and reignites the debate on Noah's culpability in the conflict.

Keywords: Familial, Curse, Offense, emotions, ideology, power relations, Noah-Ham, conflict

Introduction

The curse narrative in Genesis 9:18–27 shows actions that indicate conflict in Noah's family. Noah finds himself naked after a series of his own actions. His son Ham sees his nakedness, and he responds with curse and blessing pronouncements that have been the subject of significant

debate by scholars. The debate centers on whether Noah's pronouncement simply and exclusively indicates a divine 'prophecy'[1] or an appeal to God[2] towards subsequent events or goals regarding Canaanite nations or whether it also constitutes evidence of the persisting sinful human nature and its impact on family relations within the book of Genesis. The deterioration in family relations[3] is evident in the preceding and subsequent Genesis narratives, particularly within chapters 3-11.[4] These two conclusions reflect the kind of lenses used in reading the text —the ethnic and familial perspectives, respectively.[5] Treating Noah's pronunciation as prophecy emphasizes etiological and ethnic perspectives. However, looking at the text through the themes of the Fall and family relations reflects a familial perspective.[6] After what would pass as a *resolution* to the crisis —that is to say, when a father's two sons cover his nakedness (v. 23), the narrator brings Noah back on stage showing his actions. In Noah's own response, he revisits the crisis with evidence of an escalated conflict. In this verse (24), the narrator shows he is as proactive as in verses 20 and 21.[7] The narrator's description points to the basis for the climax of the tension in the familial conflict when Noah's response is expressed in a series of maledictions. The narrator does not account for the temporal gap between when Noah's sons cover his nakedness and when he regains his sobriety from the drunken state. Instead, he shows that Noah gets to וַיֵּדַע (find out) אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה־לוֹ בְּנוֹ (what his son had done to him) (v. 24).

[1] Several commentators, including Palmer Robertson, "Current Critical Questions Concerning the 'Curse of Ham' (Gen 9:20-27)," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41, no. 2 (June 1998): 177-188, assume or argue for prophetic utterance in Noah's words. See also Daniel A. Machiela, ed., *The Dead Sea Genesis Apocryphon: A New Text and Translation with Introduction and Special Treatment of Columns 13-17*, Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah 79 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 248.

[2] See Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990), 421.

[3] Jeffrey Scott Anderson, "The Nature and Function of Curses in the Narrative Literature of the Hebrew Bible" (Ann Arbor, MI, Vanderbilt University, 1992), 158, acknowledges that this curse narrative "describes the complete dissolution of the family," even though he argues further that issues of ethnicity are implied.

[4] Critics analyzing Genesis 1—11 show general agreement on a deteriorating relationship between human beings and God and increasing conflicts among human beings.

[5] In terms of differentiation of these two perspectives, the ethnic looks into the distant future whereas the familial is concerned with the present and immediate future.

[6] Ethnic or nationalistic perspective is used in reference to the interpretive notion in which names of individuals are used metaphorically for communities or nations, as opposed to familial notion in which the names represent individuals more often with close kinship ties. In many contexts, none of the perspectives is exclusive. At least Terence E. Fretheim, "The Book of Genesis," in *The New Interpreters Bible: General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*, vol. 1, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 403, acknowledges that "Noah's sons may be understood in both individual and eponymous terms..."

[7] In verses 20-21, Noah is depicted as planting vine, drinking wine and getting drunk, and then laying naked as a result. From verse 24 Noah is shown discovering, and responding to the situation. Therefore, the NIV rendering "find out" and NLT "learned" advances the most preferred nuance.

The narrator does not use explicit words to show that any emotions are involved in this conflict. Yet, to fully grasp Noah's response to the situation, it is essential also to consider the possible emotions entailed.[8] From a man characterized as righteous, blameless, and walking with God (Gen 6:9; 7:1), Noah's responses could easily pass as deserving and devoid of disproportionate feelings. This impression is created by the fact that the narrator, at a glance, seems to largely present Noah's perspective in verses 24–27. However, by using direct speech on Noah's response (vv. 25–27), the narrator leaves the value judgment of this response open. Therefore, this section first explores the emotional texture of Noah's reaction to the conflict situation in verses 25–27. Second, it demonstrates that some of Noah's words and the narrator's devices depict social ideology. Therefore, both the emotional texture and ideology expressed in the text point to the fallibility of Noah with regard to the family conflict in Genesis 9:20–27.

Literary Analysis

Emotions in Noah's Response (vv. 24, 25)

וַיִּיקַץ נֹחַ מִיֵּינוֹ וַיֵּדַע אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה־לוֹ בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן וַיֹּאמֶר אָרוּר כְּנָעַן עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה לְאֶחָיו

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his young[9] *son had done to him, and he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers"* (vv. 24–25).

It is worth noting that the narrative in Genesis 9:20–27 is so terse that it does not provide transitional clues to the events in the text, particularly those that relate to Noah's experience.[10] However, it is expected that emotions will be embedded in the experiences in a situation of conflict, even if not stated explicitly. In any case, a phenomenon such as cursing would not be

[8] Some critics have almost ruled a display emotions out of the scenario. For example, Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion (London: SPCK, 1984), 489, commenting on verse 24 states, "The commentaries scarcely give any consideration to the reason why the father reacts in this way. A modern would at least say that the reaction was disproportionate. But it is not the reaction of a moment. It is rather a question of a line of demarcation in human relations that was taken very seriously in the ancient world… Noah must not act as an individual in an individual father-son relationship, but as a representative of the group who must act in this way in order to preserve its [group] continuity." This ethnic perspective robs the reader the benefit of characterizing Noah. Yet the very fact that relational epithets have been used by the narrator points to a consideration of individual responsibility in characterization of the players in the narrative. Jean Calvin, *Genesis: Commentary*, ed. and trans. John King M. A., GSC (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1984), 304, has also given indication that apart from his preferred perspective, from a familial perspective, there is an "excitement of rage and anger" from Noah's response.

[9] The translation of הַקָּטָן (Gen 9:24) as "young" will be explored later in this chapter.

[10] For example, it is not told when Noah woke up from drunken state, or how he got to know the story of what had happened when he was drunk.

devoid of emotions prior to or during the malediction process. From the context, Noah is making a judicial pronouncement. However, he does not make the pronouncement like an impartial judge executing justice, but as an aggrieved party, with feelings. Even in instances where ארר has been used in seemingly unconditional and reactive ways (Jdg 5:23, Jer 20:14–18), the utterances are accompanied with emphatic phrases such as אָרוֹ אָרֹור 'curse bitterly' (Jdg 5:23), or extended lament which includes the language of shame - בְּבָשֶׁת (Jer 20:18). There are other instances where ארר is used in the participle, and where Yahweh is enacting the curse (Gen 3:14; 4:11). And in some other cases where other humans are the subject, it is a blessing narrative with curse being complimentary (Gen 27:29), or it is a case of transition into death where the blessings and curses outline how wealth will be shared (Gen 49:7). In the rest of the texts the curses are conditional and hence not reactive to offenses already committed (Deut 27–28; Josh 6:26; Judg 21: 18; 1 Sam 14:24, 28; Jer 11:3; 17:5). In Genesis 9:25, the curse is preceded by urgency as the narrator points out that "*When Noah awoke from his wine…he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers"* (vv. 24–25).[11]

Further, in this passage, literary expressions point to Noah's emotional engagement in the episode. For example, at the height of the conflict, certain lexical choices, such as ידע, could evoke emotions.[12] Several instances in the Hebrew Bible show the use of ידע intertwined with emotions, whether the subject of ידע is a deity[13] or a human being. In the case of human beings, the closest parallel to Genesis 9:24 is the instance when "*Mordecai learned* (יָדַע) *all that had*

[11] In instances when ארר is not used we observe other contexts that suggest emotions – Goliath curses (קלל) David in the context of an impending face-off in the battle field (1 Sam 17:43); Shimei curses (קלל) David in rage indicated by him doing it (יֹצֵא יָצוֹא) 'continually' and throwing stones and dust toward him (2 Sam 16:5; 6:13); and Nehemiah's actions of pulling hair and beating as he curses (קלל) implies emotions (Neh. 13:25).

[12] Matthew Elliott, *Faithful Feelings: Rethinking Emotion in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2006), 83, observes that in the Old Testament, in the word ידע "is an integration of both knowledge and emotion" that "includes knowledge that is both heartfelt and emotional."

[13] Exodus 3:7 points to God knowing (יָדַעְתִּי) about the suffering of the Israelites. Some versions translate this knowledge as indicative of Yahweh's concern for the pain and suffering — "for I know their sorrows" (KJV, NET, NKJV, NRSV, and RSV); "for I am aware of their sufferings" (NAS and NLT); "and I am concerned about their suffering" (NIV); "I am mindful of their sufferings" (TNK); and "for I have known its pains" (YLT)). Although the emotions are not indicated, responses often point that emotions are involved. Concern and awareness that prompts action or reaction is not devoid of emotions. In the book of Exodus, God is responding to cries and the plight of his people Israel. Donald Guthrie and J. A. Motyer, eds., *NBC*, 3rd ed., completely revised (Leicester, England: IVP, 1970), 123, says that "God's purpose is to prove that He knows the condition of his people and cares for them by manifestly condescending to their cry and need..." In Exodus 2:24–25 God first experiences the groaning (אֶת־נַאֲקָתָם) of his people (v. 24) and then the narrator states that "God knew" (וַיֵּדַע אֱלֹהִים) (v. 25). The sense here is that beyond the keeping of his covenant promises, God's knowledge could entail emotions of care, concern or compassion as a result of what he 'hears' and 'sees.' See also Walvoord, Zuck, and Dallas Theological Seminary, *BKC*, 111.

happened, he tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. He cried out with a loud and bitter cry" (Est 4:1, NKJ).[14] Knowledge (יָדַע), in this case, cognitive knowledge, evokes a reaction that entails emotions. In Noah's case, the emotional response is directed at the kinsman of the perceived offender. What is, therefore, certain is that from the larger context of the passage, especially in the light of Noah's reaction, the use of יָדַע here could have elicited significant emotions.

In verse 24, the narrator presents Noah's point of view that seems to characterize Ham negatively without explicitly stating the nature of his offense. It is assumed that the reader should perceive what offense is committed. At the same time, the narrator deploys certain linguistic cues that could cognitively point to a father *who feels* offended by his situation. The textual clues in verses 24 and 25: לֹו (to him) and עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים (slave of slaves) discussed below, point to the emotions involved in the conflict.[15] These feelings are also embodied in the repeated maledictions against Ham in verses 26 and 27.

The Prepositional Phrase, לֹו (v. 24)

The context suggests that the prepositional phrase,לֹו (to him) in verse 24 (וַיֵּדַע אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה־לֹו בְּנֹו הַקָּטֹן), points to the fact that Noah becomes an aggrieved person when he learns that Ham has seen his nakedness. The expression, לֹו, includes the "*lamed* of interest or (dis)advantage, (*dativus commodi et incommodi*) [which] marks the person for or against whom an action is directed."[16] The expression emphasizes that Noah is the victim of Ham's foray as if to justify Noah's response in verse 24.[17] Earlier in verse 22, the narrator indicated that an offense had been committed against Noah. In this instance, the narrator shows us Noah's point of view. In his reaction, Noah pronounces a curse upon Ham's son, Canaan (v. 25), portraying himself as the

[14] Other examples include the story where Saul hurl his spear at David, Jonathan knew (וַיֵּדַע) that his father was bent on killing David (I Sam 20:30). In this case, can be interpreted to mean "was convinced" (NET), realized (NLT, TNK) or felt. In other instances, the 'knowing' refers to perceptions or convictions (1 Sam 28:14, 2 Sam 5:12, 2 Sam 14:1, 2 Kgs 5:8, and 2 Chr 14:2). In Job 21:19 there is an urge for the wicked to experience or feel (וְיֵדָע) the justice of God.

[15] According to Paul A. Kruger, "Emotions in the Hebrew Bible: A Few Observations on Prospects and Challenges," *University of Stellenbosch* 28, no. 2 (2015): 400, 'Emotion' is a term that could have not been definitely used in the ANE context.

[16] Bruce Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 207.

17 According to Shimeon Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 65, "What people say witnesses not only to their thoughts, feelings, etc., but is often slanted to accord with the character, mood, interests and status in their interlocutor."

victim and his 'young son' as the aggressor. In several instances when the prepositional phrase is used in familial conflict, there is contextual evidence of emotional expressions: twice Abraham offends Pharaoh and Abimelech (Gen 12:17–20; 20:7–10). Equally, Isaac offends Abimelech—מַה־זֹּאת עָשִׂיתָ לָּנוּ (What is this you have done to us?) (Gen 26:10); Rebekah has a clear sense of the emotions of Esau against Jacob for what Jacob had done לוֹ (against him) (Gen 27:45). Likewise, Balak is unhappy with what Balaam has done to him (עָשִׂיתָ לִי), by defaulting on their agreement to curse Israel (Num 23:11).[18]

The emphasis in the phrase, 'וַיֵּדַע אֵת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה־לוֹ בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן' (know what his son had done against him) (Gen 9:24) creates the sense that this is a grave offense.[19] But more significantly, it points to a volatile situation that clearly locates both the aggressor and the aggressed.[20] Even then, the narrator does not precisely tell what Ham has done against his father and assumes that the reader perceives what prior events in verse 22 provoke Noah. The narrator's point in verse 24 simply shows that Noah was aggrieved by the events that happened while he was in his drunken state—particularly Ham's behavior.[21] Therefore, in verse 24, the narrator builds a case for Noah's action in verses 25–27, and the indication of emotional engagement is evident from both the context and the prepositional phrase, לוֹ.

The Superlative Hapax, עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים (v. 25)

The nature and content of the malediction, which is a pronouncement of subjugation, also point to emotions.[22] The narrator explicates the prescription of the curse thus: עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה לְאֶחָיו 'a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers' (v. 25b).[23] Although comparative material from ANE

[18] See also Laban's offence against Jacob (Gen 29:25).

[19] There are several instances when the phrase, "done to…" is used in a negative sense (See examples in Gen 12:18; 19:8; 20:9; 26:10; 27:45; 29:25; 42:28; Num 22:28; Deut 3:21). The relational term "son" is used in a context of conflict. Its use draws the reader's emotions into the reading so you identify with the nature of the conflict – a familial conflict.

[20] This is the only place in the text where the narrator, by describing Noah's point of view, shows that an offense has been committed. In the earlier verses, only the reader can make inferences based on the story.

[21] Japheth and Shem are already shown to have responded appropriately to their father's predicament (verse 23). Therefore, the matter of determination is whether it is Ham the offender or Canaan the object of Noah's curse that is referred to as בְּנוֹ (the son) who has offended Noah. From the context, it is logical to conclude that his son in view here is Ham.

[22] The fact that the malediction is targeting Canaan, and not Ham the offender, does not invalidate the reality of possible feelings involvement on the part of Noah. Noah is reacting because of how he 'feels' about the foregoing events, irrespective of whether the object of his pronouncements is Ham or Canaan.

[23] The phrase לְאֶחָיו (his brothers) could refer to either Canaan or Ham's brothers. Nicholas Oyugi Odhiambo, "Ham's Sin and Noah's Curse: A Critique of Current Views" (Ann Arbor, MI, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2007), 91, has cited several instances in the Hebrew Bible in which the term "brother(s)" is used to refer to "nephew (Gen

suggests that the word "slave" should be used only with caution, as it does not always connote negativity,[24] the context is already negative for the use of עֶבֶד in this case. This is attested by many critics who understand עֶבֶד to be used to refer to enslavement[25] or a life of disgrace.[26] From an ethnic perspective, some explain this as a situation where Canaan has "no right over his heritage," so God disinherits his land to the people of Israel.[27] Avishur explains that within the poetic form of the curse, עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים is hyperbole and ascribes meaning to it as "a slave of the slaves of his brothers—a slave of the lowest degree, base and despicable."[28] According to Gesenius, one of the ways of expressing a superlative is by using "a substantive in the construct state before the plural of the same word (which is naturally to be regarded as a partitive genitive; cf. our *book of books*)."[29] For example, קֹדֶשׁ הַקָּדָשִׁים '*the holy of holies'* (Ex 26:33) implies *the most holy place*; שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים in Song of Songs 1:1 implies "*the most excellent song.*"[30] The issue that we cannot avoid is the superlative expression and what feelings it represents for Noah, who is cursing. Anderson has correctly observed that this *hapax* expresses a "total subservience" condition posing extreme servitude.

While both the nature of the offense and the extent of Noah's feelings drive the unexpressed force of malediction, the content of the malediction (one of total subservience)

14:14, 16; 24:48; 29:12,15; Lev 10:4), cousin (2 Sam 20:9), uncle (Gen 13:8), a fellow tribesman (Num 8:26), and a member of a related tribe (Num 20:14)." This implies that "brothers" in this context could also refer to Canaan's brothers in a loose sense. However, contextually, 'brothers' seems better understood as referring to Ham's brothers —Shem and Japheth (cf. Gen 4:2; 9:22; Exod. 7:2). In which case, and for the purposes of this study, the choice of Japheth and Shem as the referents further indicates that Canaan is not the real object of the malediction, and that Ham is the person emotionally targeted by Noah's malediction. Canaan readily fits the ethnic polemics. However, from a familial perspective, and for this thesis, the primary object of the curse is less critical.

[24] Peter J. Williams, "'Slaves' in Biblical Narrative and in Translation," in *On Stone and Scroll: Essays in Honour of Graham Ivor Davies*, ed. Graham I. Davies et al., Beihefte Zur Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 420 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 452.

[25] While discussing the fulfilment of the curse, from an ethnic view, Odhiambo, "Ham's Sin and Noah's Curse," 130–131, seeks instances where enslavement rather than conquest and dominion is in view. And in his scan of the Hebrew Bible it is rare to find instances where the use of עבד, signifies enslavement except for Jer. 28:4 where 'enslavement' is qualified by the expression "placing iron on the neck of.'

[26] Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, Text and Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1987), 69.

[27] Yitsḥaḳ Avishur, *Studies in Biblical Narrative: Style, Structure, and the Ancient Near Eastern Literary Background* (Tel Aviv-Jaffa: Archaeological Center Publication, 1999), 50.

[28] Avishur, *Studies in Biblical Narrative*, 50–51. Grossfeld, ed., *The Targum Onqelos to Genesis*, 59, has noted that in the Targum Onkelos, is translated עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים as 'laboring slave,' pointing out that it adds emphasis to the servile status of Canaan.

[29] Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E. Kautzsch, trans. A. E. Cowley, Dover ed, Dover Books on Language (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006), 431.

[30] See also מֶלֶךְ מַלְכֵיָא *'king of kings'* in Daniel 2:37; מֶלֶךְ הַמְּלָכִים in 1 Timothy 6:5; Revelation 17:14, et al.

points to emotional entanglement, especially when justice is being meted out by the aggrieved party himself. There have been attempts to look at the expression עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים as a common motif in relation to those narratives in which Isaac pronounces blessings upon Jacob (Gen 27:29, 37, 40), Jacob pronounces blessings upon Judah (Gen 49:8), and Moses pronounces blessings upon Asher (Deut 33:24).[31] However, one cannot ignore the intensity with which the *hapax* expresses the impact Ham's offense has upon Noah. Therefore, the expression עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים does not only present Noah's point of view; the narrator provides a hint to the level of Noah's emotional entanglement. Hence the direct speech for Noah's response with this expression simply conveys "psychological and ideological dimensions" [32] in Noah's response.

Even the invocation of deity in verses 26 and 27 does not devitalize the emotional engagement entailed in Noah's pronouncement and emphatic condemnation of the object of his malediction to become עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים. Even though the superlative form is lacking in Noah's pronouncements in the subsequent verses (26 and 27), it is worth noting that in the curse, it is restated twice as וִיהִי כְנַעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ 'and let Canaan be his slave' (Gen 9:26, 27), thereby reinforcing the emotional dimension entailed in Noah's malediction in verse 25. [33] The repeated nature of the malediction against Canaan in verses 26 and 27 in the context of blessing pronouncements attests to the extent to which Noah feels aggrieved. The Hebrew Bible does not show any other instance in which a curse pronouncement is repeated in a similar emphasis against any perceived offender.

Ideological Undertones: A Case of Power Relations (v. 24)

The literary cues also suggest that the response of Noah and the narrator's point of view hinge on social ideology. Logically, the *rising tension* in the pericope (until verse 24) should be pitting Noah against his son, Ham. Ham has twice been described as "the father of Canaan" (vv. 18, 22). However, in verse 24, Ham's association with Canaan as his father fades into the background, and he is now associated with Noah in a conflict situation and identified as בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן. Some

[31] Avishur, *Studies in Biblical Narrative*, 50–51

[32] W. Randolph Tate, *Biblical Interpretation: An Integrated Approach*, 3rd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 92. See also Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 59.

[33] That is to say, what Avishur, *Studies in Biblical Narrative*, 50–51, describes as a hyperbole is limited to verse 25, so that there is a modification of the same expression of subjugation against Canaan to וִיהִי כְנַעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ (vv. 26, 27), without the superlative form.

authors argue that in verse 24, Ham is already substituted by Canaan in readiness for the curse in verse 25, so the son (בְּנוֹ) refers to Canaan.[34] Reyburn and Fry point out that the problem of Canaan as the referent or object of Noah's malediction is not fully resolved from either the familial or ethnic perspectives, especially when Shem and Ham are seemingly referred to as being לְאֶחָיו 'brothers' of Canaan (v. 25).[35] However, in my view, the context does not provide that Canaan should be the one referred to as Noah's son (בְּנוֹ). Since Canaan has not acted anywhere, he is a less likely offender than Ham – so Ham is the one whose description leans towards an offense in verse 22, and therefore the logical referent of בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן. At this point, the narrator assumes that his readers already understand the nature and gravity of Ham's offense. What is significant for this study is the narrator's lexical choices which not only show embedded emotions and pointers to heightened conflict but much more reflect power relations between Noah, as a father, and his son, Ham. This section explores the social ideologies and power relations carried in the phrases הַקָּטָן and the pronominal suffix in מִיֵּינוֹ.

The use of הַקָּטָן (v.24)

The adjective הַקָּטָן is used 30 times in this form in the Hebrew Bible. In most cases, its significance is more obvious and based on showing the position of the הַקָּטָן (in order of birth or in terms of age). But it also indicates the lower status of people or things.[36] However, there are similar ambiguities in its usage (see, for example, Gen 44:20 and 2 Sam 9:12). The adjective קָטָן in Genesis 44:20 could mean 'young' in relation to Jacob's age or in relation to his (i.e., Benjamin's) brothers. However, it also denotes some kind of insignificance – "the little one," often referred to as a lad (*naar*) in the same text. This reference to Jacob's קָטָן son is part of the rhetorical device in appealing to Joseph not to detain his brothers in Egypt.[37] Similarly, in 2 Samuel 9:12, the epithet (בֶּן־קָטָן) that is attributed to Mephibosheth's son, Mica, could also mean

[34] See for example, Avishur, *Studies in Biblical Narrative*, 49–50. If the sequence of names points to birth order, then Canaan ought to be the youngest son of Ham according to Gen. 10:6. This interpretation could be motivated by the fact that verse 24 does not overtly prepare the reader for the curse of Canaan in verse 25 while the perceived offender is Ham. Odhiambo, "Ham's Sin and Noah's Curse," 91, has convincingly argued for a loose use of the term "brothers" which according to the context refers to Japheth and Shem. See also J. Ernest Shufelt, "Noah's Curse and Blessing, Gen 9:18–27," *Concordia Publishing House*, Concordia Theological Monthly, 17, no. 10 (October 1946): 739, who rules out the application of *ben haqaton* to Ham on the basis that Ham was the middle son of Noah.

[35] William David Reyburn and Euan McG Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 221–22.

[36] See such usage in Genesis 27:15, 42; I Samuel 16:11; 1 Samuel 17:14; 1 Kings 11:17; 1 Chronicles. 24:31; 2 Chronicles. 31:15; and Isaiah 22:24.

[37] See also Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986, 135.

'young' in age in relation to his father (Mephibosheth) or refer to birth order. Contextually, birth order is irrelevant in this instance and usage. Perhaps it indicates being young when the narrator was referencing David's kindness, even when there was a potential threat to his reign through Mica.[38]

The narrator refers to Ham as בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן —an ambiguous yet quite significant description of Ham in relation to his father, Noah. First, the translation "youngest son" in Genesis 9:24 is common but problematic.[39] The order in the Hebrew text consistently suggests that Ham may not be the youngest son of Noah.[40] Yet from 9:24, several commentators have concluded that Ham is the youngest son of Noah,[41] so in Genesis 10:21, what is disputable is who between Shem or Japheth comes first. In this case, several commentators have argued that 10:21 shows that the birth of Noah's sons, as presented in the Genesis narratives, does not represent their birth order.[42] The phrase, הַגָּדוֹל, when used in comparing two or more people's ages, means 'older' or 'eldest' (Gen 27:1; 29:16; 10:21; Ez 16:46).[43] If הַגָּדוֹל in 10:21 modifies יֶפֶת then Japheth is deemed to be older than Shem, and probably the eldest of the three sons. Although this option provides a scenario in which Ham can be the youngest, it does not provide any scenario consistent with the Hebrew presentation of the names of Noah's sons. Even where Ham is in the middle, Shem is rendered as a lastborn. Therefore, if Japheth is older than Ham, or Japheth (being 'older' or 'eldest'), then there is a need for an explanation of the way the Hebrew Bible consistently

[38] See Mary J. Evans, *1 and 2 Samuel*, NIBC 6 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), 174.
[39] It is translated as 'youngest son' in NAS, NET, NIV, NLT, NRS, RSV, and TNK. See also Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, ed. John D. W. Watts, vol. 1, 2 vols., Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 201 and Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of the Holy Scripture*, vol. 1A, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 461. Both Mathews and Wenham affirm the superlative translation, 'youngest son.' On the contrary, other translations suggest that the superlative translation is not accurate – hence the renderings, 'younger son' (KJV and NKJ) 'young' (YLT), and ὁ νεώτερος (LXX). However, the literal rendering of the epithet, according to Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:201, is "his little son" The context does not provide for the need to exclude Japheth in the comparison if the LXX or Vulgate translations would be upheld.
[40] See Genesis. 5:32; 6:10; 9:18; 10:1; and 1 Chronicles 1:4. In all these instances, the order of naming the three sons of Noah is 'Shem, Ham, and Japheth' (שֵׁם חָם וְיֶפֶת), suggesting that Japheth is the youngest.
[41] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, 1A:319–20, relies on the 9:24 interpretation to conclude that Ham is the youngest son of Noah. On the other hand, he relies on 10:21 to conclude that Shem was the eldest son (p. 440.). Both conclusions are assumptions. First is that Japheth cannot be older while still having Ham as the eldest of them. Second, that Japheth cannot be older than Shem while Ham also remains older, but between Shem and Japheth.
[42] For example, Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:201, upholds the view that the order of names in verse 24 is not chronological, but rather euphonic – i.e., shorter words come first in the listing of names in disregard of the birth order. Reyburn and Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis*, 220, note the problem. But like Wenham who faults the redactor (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 1:201), they attribute the order of names to an existing tradition.
[43] DBD, 1996, 153, 5. (See also Shufelt 1946, 737).

presents the names of Noah's sons, which places Ham in the middle and Japheth as the youngest (Shem, Ham, and Japheth).

I argue, grammatically, that הַגָּדוֹל modifies שֵׁם in 10:21[44] so that Shem is older than Japheth; it provides a scenario where either Ham or Japheth is the youngest of the three sons of Noah, and the unlikely scenario where Ham is the eldest.[45] This permutation allows for the possibility that the sons of Noah are represented in the Genesis narrative in order of birth (Shem, Ham, and Japheth). In a sense, Genesis 10:21 is not the determinant of whether Ham is the youngest or not since whether Japheth or Shem is the older of the other, Ham has the probability of being the first, the middle, or the youngest.[46] The grammatical argument in 10:21 is a matter of choice, so the context provides the means of interpreting it. This context includes the birth order as provided in the Hebrew text.

Generally, in listing children in the HB, the birth order is often followed from the first to the last. This is particularly attested with consistency in the listing of Noah's three sons (Gen 5:32; 6:10; 7:13; 9:18; 10:1 and 1 Chr 1:4). However, it is equally attested that in accounting for the genealogy of the same children, birth order is usually not the determinant. Again, the example of Noah's sons demonstrates this: In 10:1, the listing of sons follows the order of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, while in accounting for the genealogy, the narrator begins with Japheth, Ham, and then Shem (10:1–32). This pattern also follows in 1 Chronicles, where the listing accounts for Shem, Ham, and Japheth (1 Chron 1:4), while the genealogical accounts reorder them to Japheth, Ham, and Shem (4:527). Often the order in accounting for the descendants depends on the significance of the children and often is suited to support the narrative plot.

Therefore, if we uphold the idea that the consistency in naming the three sons of Noah is in order of birth,[47] and if Noah's son referred to in 9:24 is Ham,[48] then the phrase (הַקָּטָן) cannot

[44] Shufelt, "Noah's Curse and Blessing, Gen 9:18–27," 737–738, has argued that "The Hebrew word *gadol*, here translated "elder," literally means "great." He clarifies that when applied to persons, it means the elder (of two) or the eldest. But some Hebrew scholars tell us that it is correct Hebrew usage to treat this word, not as a modifier of the possessive Japheth, but as a modifier of the whole expression "brother of Japheth." On the basis of this criticism the verse would read, "Shem, the elder brother of Japheth," instead of "Shem, the brother of Japheth the elder." And this would tend to verify the order of ages suggested above."

[45] The permutation includes Shem, Ham, and Japheth (which is the order of names as presented in the HB): Shem, Japheth, and Ham; and Ham, Shem, and Japheth.

[46] Japheth, Shem, and Ham, if הַגָּדוֹל modifies Japheth; and Shem, Japheth, and Ham, if הַגָּדוֹל modifies Shem.

[47] The biblical accounts of genealogy tend to name children in order of birth. The genealogical accounts point to listing of names by generational and birth order. This is attested in the contexts in which Noah's sons are listed. For example, Genesis 5:1–32 accounts for mankind in order of generations; in 1 Chronicles is clearly in order of

be rendered as the "youngest" son (as attested in NAS, NIV, NLT, NRS, et al.), but could be rendered as Noah's 'young' son since the birth order consistently presents Ham in the HB as the second son. But even if 10:21 would be interpreted to mean Japheth is older than Shem, there is the possibility of still having Ham in the middle (Japheth-Ham-Shem). The two scenarios above assume that the text compares the three brothers' age. Similarly, even if Ham were to be the youngest son of Noah, בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן could still be interpreted as a 'young son' in the light of the narrative context. Translating Ham as the 'young' son of Noah (v. 24) shifts the comparison of age or status from being with his brothers to that with his father.[49] The translation, 'younger' (KJV), does not make grammatical sense when comparing three brothers. Furthermore, the birth order among the sons of Noah in this description would serve no significant purpose. This, therefore, leaves 'young' as the most plausible translation of הַקָּטָן, which has an ideological function as explained below.

Logically, it would have been easier for the narrator to state the name of Noah's קָטָן son. However, since he opts to use a relational epithet (בְּנוֹ) combined with הַקָּטָן the narrator subtly shows some socially skewed power dynamics arising from the conflict that requires correction. It points in a significant way to the difference in the status between Noah and his son. This violation of social power relations carries with it the nuance that Ham was Noah's "little" son[50] or less significant compared to his father and 'contemptible' in the circumstances of offending the father.[51] Although the use of הַקָּטָן does not in any way communicate value judgment on either party's actions, it communicates the social power relations that place Noah in a superior position. Thus, the use of הַקָּטָן conveys the insignificance of Ham within the social power hierarchy against his father.

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generations. It is in this context that the order of Noah's children can be attested.

[48] Some critics hold that Noah's הַקָּטָן son in verse 24 does refer to Canaan. Shufelt, "Noah's Curse and Blessing, Gen 9:18–27," 740, for example, has argued that first, Ham is the middle son. He also advances that the Hebrew word בֵּן can be used for grandson (Gen 24:47; 28:5; and 29:5). Furthermore, he argues that verse 22 does not say what Ham did because seeing his father's nakedness and telling his brothers, according to him does not constitute doing (וַיֵּדַע) (See also Shufelt, 740).

[49] Philo, F. H. Colson, and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo Suppliment I: Questions and Answers on Genesis*, trans. Ralph Marcus (London: William Heinemann, 1929), 166. (See also III Bar iv. 9–13a). This should imply 'contemptible'.

[50] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 1:201; cf. Jer 49:15; Obad 1:2.

[51] This sense of הַקָּטָן can be found with both non-animate (Ex 18:22, 26; Isa 30:19; 22:24, and Amos 6:11) and animate things (2 Chr 18:30; and Isa 60:22) as objects in the Hebrew Bible. In the animate things category in 2 Chr 18:30, soldiers are implied as being "little" or "common" in comparison to the king himself, while in Isaiah 60:22, it refers to an insignificant people becoming significant.

The Characterizing Force of the Pronominal Suffix in מִיֵּינֹו (v. 24)

Verse 24 has two aspects with a temporal gap; when Noah wakes up from the drunken state and the time he learns about what had happened as he lies naked in his tent.[52] Whereas the second part reflects Noah's point of view, which puts בְּנֹו הַקָּטָן (his young son) on the spot, in the introductory part of the sentence, the narrator provides a clue that evaluates Noah's reaction from another point of view. Most commentators take the phrase מִיֵּינֹו (from his wine) as a temporal indicator that Noah "learned" about what Ham had "done to him" after he [Noah] became sober from a drunken state (וַיִּשְׁכַּר). However, this linguistic cue raises other interpretive possibilities regarding Noah's drunken state.

The use of the phrase is only attested in the HB in this verse. It is undoubtedly figurative that Noah could have only woken up from his drunken stupor as captured by the NLT version, which qualifies that in verse 21, Noah drank from the "wine he had made." The majority of the translations consistently render מִיֵּינֹו in a figurative form – "from his wine" (KJV, NAS, NIV, and NRS). It is important to note that in verse 21, the narrator does not include the suffix in reference to Noah taking מִן־הַיַּיִן (some of the wine), presumably, made from the same vine Noah had planted, and not מִיֵּינֹו 'from *his* wine' as expressed in verse 24. In verse 21, the narrator clearly indicates that Noah's wine originated from the vineyard he had planted without much value judgment. However, in verse 24, the narrator uses a euphemism and at the same time introduces a suffix that points to the link between the wine and Noah. Drunkenness has been looked at negatively in both the HB and the NT, whether used directly or in a figurative sense (Deut 21:20; Job 12:25; Ps 69:12; 107:27; Prov 23:21; 26:9; Isa 19:14; 24:20; 28:1, 3; Ezek 23:42; Joel 1:5; Matt 11:19; 24:4;9 Lk 7:34; 1 Cor 5:11; 6:10). As explained below, this nuance by the narrator has a characterizing force against Noah himself.

The question at hand is on the significance of the suffix, which could as well have been simply stated without the suffix – i.e., 'Noah woke up from the wine.' It is observable that in 1

[52] Machiela, Daniel A. 'Some Jewish Noah Traditions in Syriac Christian Sources' (237–252, 241–242), weaves together the idea that Noah got to know what his son had done against him through a dream (something divine). He points to the Palestinian Targum Pseudo-Jonathan which adds to 9:24 – "And Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew *through the narration of a dream* what his son *Ham* had done to him." (242). He points to a similar notion in the Qumran, and a Syriac tradition that explains the dream as "divine vision" (242). This then gives Noah the authority to respond in utterance, but this is more explicit in an additional commentary on verse 24 by Pseudo Jonathan about Ham: "…who [Ham] was so slight in merit, who had contrived that Noah should not beget a fourth son (John Westerdale Bowker, *The Targums and Rabbinic Literature: An Introduction to Jewish Interpretations of Scripture* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 173.

Samuel 1:14, Hannah is being faulted for her wine (albeit mistakenly) — הָסִירִי אֶת־יֵינֵךְ מֵעָלָיִךְ ‘Put away *your* wine….’ This suggests that the suffix (in Noah’s case, וֹ) has a characterizing force. Interestingly, in 1 Samuel 1:14, the LXX translates the suffix, while Genesis 9:24 omits the suffix, yet both play a characterizing role that would have negative connotations on Hannah and Noah, respectively. Even in the case of Samson, where he wakes from *his* sleep (וַיִּיקַץ מִשְּׁנָתוֹ) (Jdg 16:14), the pronominal suffix tends to re-enforce the association of the action (sleep) with the subjective pronoun—thus playing a characterizing role. Several other instances, including non-animate ones (Prov 9:2; Jer 51:7; Dan 1:8), show that the association between the construct and the genitive is essential for characterization purposes. All the examples above carry a negative connotation concerning the persons or associations involved. In essence, reference to *his* wine was unnecessary, so stating it reinforces negative characterization. In other words, it is probable that the conjugation, מְיֵינוֹ, represents a derogatory association between the subject and genitive rather than a mere reference to the wine that has already been mentioned earlier. This characterization represents the narrator’s effort to use a euphemism and syntactically create the required characterization of Noah.

Summary and Conclusion

Genesis 9:21–27 pericope suggests emotional aspects were entailed, first by considering its very nature. In particular, the act of pronouncing maledictions and blessing pronouncements certainly evokes emotions. Noah, by virtue of being offended, must have felt emotional pain. This accounts for the prepositional phrase, לוֹ, that indicates offense against Noah. Secondly, since Noah reacted to an offense, it cannot be assumed the response was devoid of emotions. The narrator, deploying direct speech, provides linguistic cues that Noah was emotionally involved. The fact that this is Noah’s direct speech indicates that both terms represent his own point of view. The hapax, עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים, by itself, begins to point at the extent that Noah felt offended and the emotions evoked in the process of malediction.

Similarly, ideological tones are attested through linguistic cues. In the light of the linguistic cues in verse 24, we conclude that the narrator chooses to highlight Noah’s point of view by applying the term הַקָּטָן to Ham. I argue that the common translation “youngest” is unlikely for הַקָּטָן and that “younger” does not make grammatical sense either in reference to his

brothers. Even if he were the youngest, the context indicates that "young" would make better contextual sense. In which case, הַקָּטָן is ideological. Therefore, the translation, 'young,' logically leads the reader to the object of the malediction and carries with it notions of power relations. Together with the relational epithet, בְּנוֹ, the narrator is subtly conveying power relations between Ham and Noah, which ultimately play out in the reaction of Noah in verses 25-27. Ideological undertones are carried further with the pronominal suffix in מִיֵּינוֹ 'his wine' (v. 24). The narrator uses the phrase as a euphemism for drunkenness. This nuance would point to the fact that the narrator and Noah do not necessarily share the same point of view since verse 25 represents Noah's reaction to Ham, just as is the case with the phrase, בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן. Consequently, the use of the pronominal suffix attests to Noah's negative characterization. Given these emotions, and the social ideology of power relations, one begins to question the legitimacy of Noah's pronouncements. It is, therefore, plausible that Noah's reaction to his son's offense is based on social power relations and the feelings that accompanied the situation around him while he lay naked in the tent.

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