



Nuggets 24: Giving Sin a Makeover

The captain of a slave ship sat on deck enjoying the breeze and reading his Bible.* Below decks human captives from Africa were laid row on row like cordwood with hardly room to move. Those who died were discarded along the way; the rest would soon be auctioned at slave market in the New World, families torn apart.

The captain was reading the story where Noah, found drunk in his tent, was disrespected by his son Ham. Noah cursed Ham and his son Canaan (who apparently had a part). The descendants of Canaan would be slaves to the descendants of Shem, another of Noah's sons. Since black people descended from Ham, the captain took comfort in the fact that he was helping carry out the scriptural curse on them. This same theology was later used to justify the oppression of Africans under *apartheid* in South Africa.

More careful reading would have shown that Noah's curse followed a particular branch of Ham's family, Canaan. African people did not come from Canaan but from another son, Cush. The curse was fulfilled when God dispossessed the Canaanites and gave their land to Israel, descendants of Shem. It had nothing to do with Africans. Even if it had, the captain had plenty to worry about. In biblical history, when God used the actions of the wicked to inflict a curse on those deserving punishment, God nevertheless held the wicked accountable for their actions.

How tempting it is to grab anything from the Bible to justify our pleasure or profit. How easy it is to deceive ourselves.

*From the early part of Stephen Vincent Benet's epic Civil War poem *John Brown's Body*

Genesis 9:20-27; 2 Peter 3:16; Jeremiah 17:9; 2 Thessalonians 2:10b-12; Matthew 22:29; 2 Corinthians 4:2; 2 Timothy 2:15; Matthew 5:6; John 7:17

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