

Lessons From Sinning Saints

Genesis 9:20-11:25

Introduction

After our discussion today, the rest of the book of Genesis will only cover three hundred fifty years, yet it is the majority of the book. It deals primarily with Abraham and Joseph and I am looking forward to studying the lives of these patriarchs.

Today, we come, in chapter 9, to an unfortunate passage of scripture. While in our last study we discussed the ingredients of integrity, today we will have a lesson from a sinning saint. Unfortunately, both lessons revolve around the same individual. That gives us the point that anyone can sin. In fact, no one is above sin or temptation – not even one like Noah.

Exposition

Look at Genesis, chapter 9, verses 20 through 29. This is after the flood, when Noah's family had embarked from the ark.

Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard.

He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent.

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.

(so he prophetically declared),

So he said, "Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall 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."

Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the flood.

So all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years, and he died.

Sin . . . in the life of Noah

The parallel between Noah and Adam is interesting. The first man to ever live, Adam, sinned by partaking of the literal fruit of the vine. Noah, the first man after the flood, would also sin by drinking the fruit of the vine. Both men would fall and, as a result, one would recognize his nakedness, the other would become naked. Both would receive a covering from someone else, and, as a result of that sin, both would receive a curse. And yet, in that curse, would also be the promise of blessing.

Now the sins of Noah were two-fold:

- First, Noah became drunk, and drunkenness was in violation of God's command, especially as you read later in the Old Testament.
- Secondly, not only did he become drunk, Noah became naked; that is, he, in his lewdness that we dare not even imagine, perhaps in his tent, shed his clothing in drunkenness.

Noah, this man of God, the preacher of righteousness, was now drunk and naked. He was shamefully exposing himself.

I found, in fact, at least six different interpretations of this passage of scripture. The interpretation that I will follow is that which literally follows the meaning of the Hebrew words. I know there is safety in discovering what the literal text means.

The words in verse 21, "uncovered himself," are the same Hebrew words used in scripture for "shameful exposure". There is nothing particularly

sensational in this – Noah became drunk and took off his clothing; perhaps lewdly dancing about.

The confusion is in what Ham did. Some would suggest at least six different interpretations of this. Perhaps he had an incestuous relationship with Noah; that is, he uncovered his nakedness being a Hebrew idiom of lying with his wife. The text, however, does not indicate that. Some have even suggested that there is a homosexual violation. Yet the text does not say that Ham uncovered the nakedness of Noah, but that Noah uncovered his own nakedness.

So, what did Ham do? Verse 24 says,

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son [Ham] had done to him.

Let me give two things that Ham did. Notice verse 22 again.

Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside.

- First, Ham saw.

The Hebrew meaning of the word is that he gazed; he observed; he watched. He is perhaps behind some covering of the tent, and he is watching his father.

- Not only that, I think the real sin was in what follows. The Hebrew word “told” means literally, “with delight”. Ham was really enjoying this.

This was not only dishonoring the honor of his father, but perhaps, was even revealing that in his heart, he had repudiated the faith of his father. “Ha! This is the preacher of righteousness. Look at what he’s doing.” and he was delighted in his father’s fall.

The only thing that is worse than committing a specific sin perhaps, is the devilish delight in observing that sin in someone else and sharing it with others. Why do you think the tabloids make millions of dollars every year? Because they pander to the fallen nature of man that delights in the sorry side, the seedy side of humanity. So their stories are of the fights, the break ups, the divorces, the lawsuits, and all of the seedy things that happen, the tragic things that happen to mankind.

So, Noah awakens from his stupor and makes a prophetic curse. Look at verse 24 again.

When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him.

Noah knew Ham had mocked him and he makes a prophetic curse; that is, he is saying what will happen. He is not saying, “Okay, Canaan, or Ham, you are now going to do this,” he is saying, “I perceive by revelation that this will be your future.”

So, Noah gives the curse and in it, is also the promise. Look at verse 26a again.

He also said, “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem . . .

Shem would be the father of the Semites. You can see in the name “Shem” the word “Sem”. This is Semite nations from which Israel would come. So, this is the promise of the coming Messiah.

Japheth is the father of the Indo-European nations, from which the majority of Americans have come. Ham will become the father of the African, the Egyptian, and the Arabian nations. This is easily found in documented accounts – not only in biblical records, but in accounts by secular anthropologists.

By the way, nations, or the idea of nationality, are God’s idea. Turn in your Bible to the book of Acts. It has been interesting and has given me great comfort to discover this in chapter 17. Look at verses 24 through 27a. Paul is speaking in the Areopagus to the philosophers. He is referring to the “unknown god”.

The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything; since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;

(note verses 26 and 27a),

and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times . . .

(that is, how long they will last as a nation),

. . . and the boundaries of their habitation,

(that is, how large they will grow; how much land or territory they will conquer before crumbling),

that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him . . .

What is the purpose of the nations today? They are visual lessons that you and I, as part of a nation, need to search for God; to follow God.

What did great Rome teach us? What did Babylon teach us? They teach us that when we reject God, He rejects us.

What will the historians write of America one day? That we, as a nation, began to reject God. And, that He would then reject us. He will allow us to bear the consequences of our own immorality, and like Rome, crumble from within.

Slavery . . . in the future of Canaan

Now look again at Genesis, chapter 9. There are some people who believe the Africans or the black peoples are consigned to slavery and that God even ordained it as such in this curse. I have even heard that from evangelical lips.

There is one very clear way of discovering whether that is true or not – read what the text says. I do not mean to be facetious or caustic, yet it is tragic that this view, among others, is the result of a simple misunderstanding, if not ignorance of what the text says.

Please note verse 25 again.

. . . Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers.

Who is cursed – Ham and all of his descendants? No. Canaan is cursed – one branch of the descendants of Ham, not all of the descendants of Ham. Only one branch is cursed, and that is Canaan. Canaan would be the forefather of all the Canaanites.

Do you remember the Canaanites? They were inhabiting the land which God had promised to Israel. When Joshua led the people into Canaan, what did they have to do? Subjugate; overthrow; bring under their authority who? The Canaanites.

From the Canaanites came the Hittites, Perizzites, the Amorites, the Jebusites, and all the other “ites”. All of these came from Canaan, and now in fact, they have ceased to exist as a nation. The curse has been fulfilled.

If anyone had a claim to this curse in this century, by the way, it would not be the African, it would be the Arab who lives in Palestine.

Now, I have mentioned the descendants of Ham and Shem, so what about Japheth? Let me give some interesting facts about his descendants.

In verse 27 of Genesis, chapter 9, we are told that God would “enlarge Japheth”. Enlarging means that

he would conquer, he would enlarge his borders. That is exactly what happened. Let me share a few thoughts with you.

Japheth’s son Gomer, who is mentioned in chapter 10, verses 2 and 3, is the forefather of the Germans – that is where we get that nation. One of Gomer’s sons, Togarmah, established Turkey. They always named their nations after themselves, being modest as they were. In fact, the Armenians came to be called the House of Targam.

Especially interesting are three of Japheth’s sons mentioned in chapter 10. Look at verse 2.

The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras.

Now Magog, Tubal, and Meshech have given us the northern people, or the Russians. In fact, Ezekiel mentions Magog, in chapter 38, as the prince of Rosh. The Hebrew word for “chief prince” is the word “rosh,” or “rush,” from which we get our English word “Russia”.

Now, by the way, we are not talking about millions of years ago, we are talking about four thousand years ago. This is clearly seen in the histories kept by man, and especially in this table of nations.

Now the two tribes of Tubal and Meshech are found in the writings of Herodotus. He indicated that by his time, the names had developed into Mesken and Theobelian. These two tribes would push north and east of the Black Sea into what is now Russia. In fact, these two tribes are now used as the dividing marks of the modern state of Russia. Tubal is now Tobol on the Tobolsk River and Mesken is now Moscow on the Moskva River.

Fascinating to me, when I think of that, that this was the beginning of that which would one day rise up against Israel, are the writings of Paul that God made every nation and He appointed not only the their times; that is, how long they will exist, but also their boundaries. God is in total control. He is not only the creator of nations, He is the controller of nations. I do not mean to imply by that that America is safe from the Russians. I do not find America in our text, but what I do find is the sovereign God who has mapped out even the nations and their boundaries.

Separation . . . in the course of history

Now turn to chapter 11, which introduces the story of the tower of Babel. This is a story of great mystery. It is fairly well documented that astrology and even the zodiac and idolatry ultimately trace their roots back to Nimrod and his kingdom of Babylon.

Note where Babylon got its start. Turn back to chapter 10 and read verses 8 through 10a.

Now Cush became the father of Nimrod; he became a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the Lord; . . .

(“in the face of the Lord,” it should say),

. . . therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the Lord.” The beginning of his kingdom was Babel . . .

This is a spite; this is hunting in spite of the face of the Lord. Nimrod is the first man to be called “mighty,” and these verses refer to his prowess in hunting – not animals, but the souls of men that he will use in building his kingdom of Babylon. In fact, his name “Nimrod” means, “let us rebel”.

Nimrod’s father Cush, had heard the curse and said, “I am not going to abide by that. My little boy will grow up one day to be the rebuilder; the rebuilder of a nation.” and thus, we have Nimrod.

Turn to chapter 11 and look at verses 1 through 3.

Now the whole earth used the same language and the same words. It came about as they journeyed east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. They said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly.” And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.

The next verse is a violation of God’s command that we read in chapter 9, to replenish or fill the entire earth. Look at verse 4a.

They said, “Come, let us build for ourselves a city and a tower whose top will reach into heaven . . .”

This “into heaven” could be translated “atop”. This is their religious system; this is replacing God. This tower will reach the heavens – that was their declaration. Continue to verse 4b and notice what they said.

“. . . and let us make for ourselves a name, otherwise we will be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.”

This tower was a monument erected to symbolize their rebellion against the command of God. Archeologists have discovered these towers, like the ziggurats, and they have found that at the top of these towers were altars and rooms dedicated to the worship of the signs of the zodiac. In fact, they have found these symbols painted and drawn on the walls. So, what we have today in modern astrology is not modern, it is going back in its roots to the ultimate rebellion that God would one day, in this chapter, come to stop.

Let me read something rather interesting from a man who has studied this. He says the text speaks of the top of the tower as being that which was dedicated to the heavens as a place of worship. So, astrology, which focuses on the study of the zodiac, originated in Babylon. If you look at any book on astrology, you will find that it was the Chaldeans, which is another name for the inhabitants of Babylon, who first developed the zodiac by dividing the sky into sections and giving meanings to each on the basis of the stars that are found there. A person’s destiny is said to be determined by whatever section or sign he is under.

Do you know what your sign is, by the way? I think most of us have stumbled into that knowledge which points its finger back to rebellion against God.

Let me continue. From Babylon, astrology passed to the empire of ancient Egypt, where it mingled with animism and polytheism. The pyramids were constructed with certain mathematical relationships to the stars. The sphinx – that huge monument that is still in Egypt today, and if you have ever toured there, you have seen that – has astrological significance. It has the head of a woman, symbolizing Virgo, the virgin, and the body of a lion, symbolizing Leo. Virgo is the first sign of the zodiac; Leo is the last. So the sphinx, which actually means “joining” in Greek, is the meeting point of the zodiac. The sphinx is symbolizing, in effect, that this is the beginning and the end. It is saying, “Our religious system is eternal. It is the alpha, the beginning, and the omega, the ending.”

False religion, even way back in the time of Nimrod, sought to obliterate the true beginning and end. It is interesting that when Jesus Christ comes to rule, He will state, as we are told in the latter chapters of Revelation, chapters 21 and 22, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

I would warn you with this, if you read the horoscopes – stop, it is a dangerous thing. It traces its roots back to the idolatry of Babylon.

Well, God confounds the language. Look at verses 5 through 9 of Genesis, chapter 11.

The Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. The Lord said, “Behold, they are one people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they begin to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do . . .

(that is, evil),

“. . . will be impossible for them. Come, let Us . . .

(perhaps an indication of the Trinity),

“. . . go down and there confuse their language, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of the whole earth; and they stopped building the city.

That was the plan of God, “I don’t want you erecting a one world government. I don’t want you to have one city ruling all the world. I want you to scatter and develop into the nations that I have designed.”

So, He came down and took care of that which even today, would create a common barrier; that is, language. It is hard enough to understand each other even when we speak English, much less when there is another language.

I read an illustration of this point by a pastor. A lady in his congregation was a kindergarten teacher. It snowed a lot where she taught, and snowsuits were required. One day she was, with a lot of difficulty, helping a little boy into his snowsuit. It was one of those with all the ties, snaps, and buttons. It took her about five minutes. Finally, when she got the boy in it, he looked up at her and said, “This isn’t my snowsuit.”

So, with the grace of kindergarten teachers, who deserve a medal of honor anyway, she pulls the snowsuit off this boy, after untying and unsnapping everything. She finally gets him out . . . and he continues his story, “This is my sister’s snowsuit, but my mother said I could wear it today.”

If I had been that teacher, there would be one less kid on the planet earth!

There is great difficulty in communicating. In fact, the coming kingdom is prophesied by Zephaniah, in chapter 3, verse 9 (KJV), where God says through him,

For then [in the kingdom] will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve Him with one consent.

Isn’t it fascinating to know that in heaven, we will all once again have the same language. The Spanish, the Chinese, the Mexicans, the Americans will all be able to communicate with one language, and I think, communicate perfectly.

Application

Now I want to take a practical turn in this sermon. Let me give several things that will be helpful from this passage, unfortunate as it is.

One thing was perfectly clear to me, as I studied this passage – had we written the Bible, we would have left out the sins of the patriarchs. There would have been things that we would have ignored, but God does not. In fact, I think that is another proof that God determined the content of this Book.

Sometimes the Bible is so comprehensive that it is embarrassing. Sometimes it probes, and we wonder why. We wonder why the Lord gave us these last five verses of Noah’s life. Why not end on a good note? Because I think God wants us to learn not only from the successes of the saints, but from their failures as well.

Seven lessons from the sins of Noah

Let me give seven lessons from the sins of Noah.

A believer is never immune to sin

1. The first lesson is that a believer is never immune to sin.

Noah was six hundred years old when the flood came, and he had lived his life righteously for six hundred years. Then, in his later years, he mars his perfect record.

Is this unique in the Bible? Absolutely not. Moses, in his later years, struck the rock declaring for himself glory due only to God. When David was in his fifties, he fell into immorality.

Past success does not guarantee future safety from sin

2. That leads me to the second lesson that past success does not guarantee future safety from sin.

You do not inoculate yourself by all of the successes of the past week. Satan does not say, “Well, you know, he’s been really good this past week. We won’t bother him this week.”

Nor does Satan say, “Well, that person is almost in heaven. Let’s leave him alone.”

No, the temptation to sin persists to the grave.

Small temptations are often the most dangerous

3. The third lesson is that small temptations are often the most dangerous.

Look at Noah – the preacher of righteousness. He was a man who for a hundred and twenty years, said “No” to all kinds of immorality. Then, with a cheap flask of homemade wine, he is brought to his knees.

It was a small temptation, and yet, it was the most dangerous. Perhaps that is what the writer of scripture means, in I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 12, when he says,

. . . let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.

Watch out for the little things.

Temptations are always changing faces

4. Lesson number four is that temptations are always changing faces.

By the time you master one temptation, another one comes along. I say “changing faces” because ultimately, all temptation asks the same question, “Whose voice are you going to listen to – the voice of God or the voice of the world system, your flesh, and Satan?”

Sin never affects the sinner alone

5. Fifthly, sin never affects the sinner alone.

This is probably one of the most tragic parts of sin. It never affects just the sinner. You might say, “Oh no, my sin isn’t affecting anyone but me. In fact, no one even knows.”

However, it is that sin in your life that keeps you from being the kind of husband, father, believer, testimony that you should be. Someone is robbed when you and I get away from what God would have us to be.

Someone wrote, “Sin is like a pebble thrown into a pond of water. Although the pebble strikes only one place, the ripples from its force stretch outward.”

Believers never have an excuse for sin

6. Lesson number six, and mark this one well, believers never have an excuse for sin.

I stress “believers” because I Corinthians, chapter 10, verse 13, says,

No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.

When we sin, we say “No” to God’s escape plan.

God never ignores sin

7. Lesson number seven is that God never ignores sin.

God never ignores sin, even in the life of a saint. God never plays favorites. Sin will always bring guilt, no matter who you may be. That guilt may bring the loss of joy; the loss of fellowship – there are always consequences.

Two lessons from our own sin nature

There are two further lessons that we can learn from our own biography of sin that God has given us. We are like Noah. Although we are not in the scriptures, we can certainly see the similarities that reside in our sin nature. Let me give two very positive lessons that we can learn from our sin nature.

I know that sounds odd that there is something positive to be learned about our sin nature. There is, but notice, I did not say “sin”. There is nothing positive about sin. I do not want anyone to call me this week and say, “Pastor, I sinned. And man, you’re right, I learned that positive lesson.”

I said “sin nature”. God can use the awareness of our nature to sin to do two things.

It develops appreciation for our position in Christ

1. Lesson number one is that the awareness of our own sin nature can be used by God to develop our appreciation for our position in Christ.

Paul, the great apostle, cried to God in verses 19 and 24 of chapter 7 of Romans (paraphrased),

Lord, whatever I want to do, I can't do it. Whatever I don't want to do, it seems like that's what I'm always doing. Who will deliver me from this body of death? Who will excise from me the sinful nature?

The body of death is referring to a Roman custom. A man who had committed murder was taken to the cross, but before he was put on that cross, if the murdered victim was a slave or someone of ill repute or perhaps, not a Roman citizen, the dead body would be laid on top of the murderer and strapped to him neck to neck, wrist to wrist, waist to waist, leg to leg, and then, put on the cross. That is what is referred to as this body of death. The murderer would die a hideous death with his victim cheek to cheek.

So, Paul says, in verse 24b,

. . . Who will set me free from the body of this death?

In other words, "Who will set me free from this wicked old man; this old nature that is strapped to me?"

Paul's awareness of his sin was so great, but then he concludes with, in chapter 7, verse 25a, and chapter 8, verse 1,

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

It develops gratitude for Christ's work in us

2. Lesson number two is that the awareness of our own sin nature can be used by God not only to develop our appreciation for our position in Christ, but to develop our gratitude for Christ's work in us.

II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 17, tells us,

Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things [continually] passed away; behold, new things have [continually] come.

We get the idea that when someone – scruffy, unshaven, dirty – becomes a believer and the next week, he is in church – three piece suit, Bible in hand – then, yes, he is a believer. No, no – it is a Christian life, and it takes a life. It is not the Christian moment. One of the things about our sin nature is that it develops in us the appreciation that Jesus Christ is at work in our lives. There is so much that needs to be changed. There is so much developing that can take place. Do not expect changes in everything in a moment – it takes a life.

However, be confident that, as we are told in Philippians, chapter 2, verse 13,

. . . it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.

I like what Paul says in Philippians, chapter 1, verse 6,

. . . I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ.

God is at work. Our sin nature is a lesson. The reason that you and I are miserable in our sin is simply because Jesus Christ gives us the sense of guilt. It is our relationship with Him that shows us our wickedness. Thank God for that. It is a dangerous situation when an individual has no sense of sin.

Do you fail? Yes. Do you sin? Yes. But you know your sins are forgiven, because you gave your life to Jesus Christ. Isaiah, chapter 1, verse 18a, tells us,

. . . Though your sins are as scarlet, they will be as white as snow . . .

This is the story of Noah – a saint and a sinner. Did he fail? Yes. Did he sin? Yes. God gave the story to us so that we might learn. Yet God would write Noah's epithet in Hebrews, chapter 11, verse 7,

By faith Noah . . . became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

We too have the righteousness of God, if we have come to the cross of Jesus Christ.