

What is the biblical account of Shem, Ham, and Japheth?

Shem, Ham, and Japheth were the three sons of Noah who along with their wives were carried in the ark during the great flood. Their descendants went on to re-populate the world (Genesis 10:1). Noah fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth after he was 500 years old (Genesis 5:32). If Noah had any other children, they are not mentioned in the biblical account. Only Shem, Ham, and Japheth are mentioned.

The Israelites came from the line of Shem; in fact, the word Semite comes from the name of Shem. Other descendants of Shem include the Assyrians, Chaldeans, Elamites, Arameans, Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites. Japheth's line produced the Persians, Romans, Scythians, and Macedonians. Ham's line produced the Canaanites, the Babylonians, the Phoenicians, the Cushites, and the Egyptians. Each of the races and people-groups that exist today can trace their lineage back to one of these three brothers.

There is only one biblical story recorded that concerns Shem, Ham, and Japheth. After the flood waters receded, Noah was "a man of the soil" and grew a vineyard (Genesis 9:20). One day, after drinking too much wine, Noah passed out in his tent and lay there naked and exposed. Ham "saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside" (Genesis 9:22). Some have suggested that Ham—or possibly his son Canaan—performed an inappropriate sexual act on his drunken father, but that is nothing more than speculation. Whatever the extent of Ham's sin, Shem and Japheth refused to join him in dishonoring their father; instead, they walked into the tent backward without looking at Noah and lay a blanket over him to cover him (Genesis 9:23). When Noah woke up and found out what Ham had done, he cursed Ham's child, Canaan, saying, "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers" (Genesis 9:25). Noah then blessed his other

two sons and reiterated Canaan's servitude to both Shem and Japheth (verses 26-27).

Noah's curse on Canaan was not an empty threat. In fact, it could be seen as a prophecy of events to unfold in the lives of the Canaanites. In Genesis 10, the descendants of Canaan are listed. They include the Sidonians, the Hittites, the Jebusites, the Amorites, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 10:15-19). Noah's curse/prophecy came true during the time of Joshua. The Canaanites, descendants of Ham and Canaan, were conquered by the Israelites, descendants of Shem. True to God's Word, some of the Canaanites became slaves (Joshua 9:27; 17:12-13). It's important to note that Noah's three sons were blessed (Genesis 9:1) and, out of Ham's descendants, only the line of Canaan was cursed (Genesis 9:25). The historical record supports the fact of Noah's curse on Canaan and is powerful evidence of the accuracy of Scripture.