

The Nature Of Ham's Sin

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Genesis 9:21 states that after the flood Noah "became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent" (NIV). His son Ham "saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers," Shem and Japheth (v. 22). On hearing this the two brothers walked into Noah's tent and covered their father with a garment. They walked backward with their faces "turned away so that they did not see their father's nakedness" (v. 23).

Bible commentators differ on what Ham did wrong. One view is that Ham was guilty of incest with his mother, Noah's wife. This was proposed by Josiah Priest in 1843, who wrote, "It is believed by some, and not without reason, that (the crime of Ham) did not consist alone in seeing his father's nakedness as a *man*, but rather in the abuse and actual *violation* of his own mother."¹

Others say the offense was homosexuality. The earliest mention of this interpretation appears in the Talmud (AD 500-550), which states that "he [Ham] sodomized" Noah.² Beginning in the 1960s many scholars have accepted this interpretation.³ Most who

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hold this view offer little or no support, but some advocates of the homosexuality view present scriptural arguments in support of their view.⁴

A third view is that Ham was guilty of voyeurism, of finding sexual gratification in seeing his father naked.⁵

This article reviews the scriptural arguments advanced by advocates of each of the three views and offers a rebuttal of each view.⁶

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Some writers have suggested that Ham's report to his brothers was in the form of laughter, ⁷ jeering,⁸ or mocking.⁹ However, these ideas read too much into the text. Genesis 9 offers no hint of the form of the Ham's report. The text simply places the divu...

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