

**THE CURSE OF CANAAN RIGHTLY
INTERPRETED. AND KINDRED TOPICS.
THREE LECTURES DELIVERED
IN THE DELIVERED IN THE REFORMED
DUTCH CHURCH, EASTON, PA.
JANUARY AND FEBRUARY, 1862**

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CORNELIUS H. EDGAR

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BY THE PASTOR,

REV. CORNELIUS H. EDGAR.

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LECTURE I.

THE CURSE OF CANAAN:—BY WHOM AND ON WHOM PRONOUNCED.

GENESIS IX., 24, 25: And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him. And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

Those who derive from these words divine authority for enslaving the Negro, are bound to show that Noah spoke these words *as he was moved by the Holy Ghost*. They are also bound to show that the *Negro is descended from Canaan*.

It is not in this passage, nor is it anywhere, in the inspired writings, declared, that Noah uttered these words by the authority and inspiration of God.

An argument has been built upon these words to excuse and to justify the enslaving of the descendants of Ham. In the argument it is assumed that "God spake all these words." It is only an assumption. It must be proved that Noah uttered them when inspired, and by command and authority of the Almighty. For if, when Noah cursed Canaan—as we have no doubt he did curse Canaan—he was speaking as a *private* person, and not as an inspired prophet of Jehovah, no inference as to the divine institution of slavery can be therefrom derived.

You are not to suppose that "holy men of old, who spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost," were *always*, and in all things, moved by the Holy Ghost. Sometimes they spoke as other men. I raise the question,—*Did Noah utter his curse on Canaan as he was moved by the Holy Ghost?* Necessity is laid

upon those who infer, from Noah's curse upon Canaan, that God instituted slavery, to show, without a shadow of a doubt, from the Bible, as the only admissible authority in the case, that Noah was speaking at the time *by authority*. Unless it can be proved, either by a direct affirmation or by a fair inference, that he did so speak, then, the premises as to the divine institution of slavery being unsound, the inference is not legitimate. I am entirely honest in doubting whether Noah was under special inspiration when he said, "Cursed be Canaan." This doubt I can entertain without invalidating my conviction that Noah was, upon the whole, righteous before God; and that, as a preacher, he labored for more than a century to reform a corrupt church, and to save a sinful and doomed generation. I am confirmed in my doubt when I read that God commended him before the flood, while I find no special commendation of him after the flood. When I read of Noah's sad fall, after he began to be an husbandman—being drunken—I then see a force in the little word *this*, in Chap. vii. 1, which had escaped my notice until I see the emphasis which Noah's subsequent history has given it; for in that place God says, "Thee have I seen righteous before me in *this* generation;" whereas in a subsequent generation Noah was not so faultless, and fell below Shem and Japheth in moral deportment.

What a sad and instructive history of the second progenitor of the human family is contained in the last ten verses of the ninth chapter of Genesis! The great Noah, missionary of the Lord, perhaps to the ends of the earth, has left his high calling. He has gone down from the high position of being a preacher, and has planted a vineyard. And what next? The most natural thing to think of. He drank of the wine. And what then? Just what has happened to ten thousand who drink wine,—he *was drunken*. And what then? He was humbled and disgraced in the presence of his family and before all the world to the end of time. What a fall! He has laid aside preaching; for not a word do we find has he uttered as a preacher since the flood. God has left him to worldliness and its results. Immediately upon recovering from his drunkenness, what does he say? Discovering the misconduct of Canaan, his grandson

(his younger son), who was either the discoverer and publisher of Noah's shame, or the conniver with Ham in publishing it, Noah, as was most natural, moved by chagrin and indignation and self-reproach, and not moved by the Holy Ghost, says, Canaan deserves to be a menial servant for his mean and undutiful exposure of my shame. It was just as natural, without any special inspiration, for him to offer an opinion and to express his wishes as to the future history of Japheth and Shem, whose conduct he could not but commend.

It is not necessary—nay, it is not admissible—to take the words of Noah, as to Shem and Japheth, as *prophetic*. We shall presently see that, as prophetic, they have failed. Let us not, in expounding Scripture, introduce the *supernatural* when the *natural* is adequate. Noah had now known the peculiarities of his sons long enough, and well enough, to be able to make some probable conjecture as to their future course, and their success or failure in life. Is it what parents do nowadays. They say of one son, He will succeed,—he is so dutiful, so economical, so industrious. They say of another, This one will make a good lawyer—he is so sharp in an argument. Of another, they say, We will educate him for the ministry, for he has suitable qualifications. While of another they may be constrained to predict that he will not succeed, because he is indolent, and selfish, and sensual. Does it require special inspiration for a father, having ordinary common sense, to discover the peculiar talents and dispositions of his children, and to predict the probable future of each of them? Sometimes they hit it; sometimes they miss it. Shall it not be conceded to Noah that he could make as probable a conjecture, as to his sons, as your father made as to you, or as you think yourselves competent to make for either of your sons? Noah made a good hit. What he said as to the future of his sons, and of their posterity, has turned out, in some respects, as he said it would, but *not exactly*,—not so exactly as to authorize our calling his words an inspired prophecy, as we shall presently show. But, if we set out to establish or to justify slavery upon these words of Noah, on the assumption God *spoke* by Noah as to the curse and blessings here recorded, we have a right to expect to find

the facts of history to correspond. If the facts of history do not correspond with these words of Noah, then God did not speak them by Noah as his own. Let us face this matter. It is said, by those who interpret the curse of Canaan as divine authority for slavery, that *God has hereby ordained that the descendants of Ham shall be slaves*. The descendants of Shem are not, of course, doomed to that curse. Now, upon the supposition that these are the words of God, and not the denunciations of an irritated father just awaking from his drunkenness, we ought not to find *any of Canaan's descendants out of a condition of slavery, nor any of the descendants of Shem in it*. If we do, then either these are not God's words, or God's words have not come true. But it is a fact that not all of Ham's entire descendants, nor even of Canaan's descendants (on whom *alone*, and not at all on Ham, nor on his *three other sons*, Noah's curse fell), are now, nor ever have been, as a whole, in a state of bondage. The Canaanites were not slaves, but free and powerful tribes, when the Hebrews entered their territory. The Carthaginians, it is generally admitted, were descended from Canaan. They certainly were free and powerful when, in frequent wars, they contended, often with success, against the formidable Romans. If the curse of Noah was intended for all the descendants of Ham, it signally failed in the case of the first military hero mentioned in the Bible, who was the founder of a world-renowned city and empire. I refer to Nimrod, who was a son of Cush, the oldest son of Ham. Of this Nimrod the record is, "He began to be a mighty one in the earth: he was a mighty hunter before the Lord: and the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. Out of that land went forth Asshur and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah, and Resen, between Nineveh and Calah; the same is a great city." This is Bible authority, informing us that the grandson of Ham (Nimrod, the son of Cush) was a mighty man—the *great man* of the world, in his day—the founder of the Babylonian empire, and the ancestor of the founder of the city of Nineveh, one of the grandest cities of the ancient world. We are not led to conclude, from these wonderful achievements by the posterity

of Cush (who was the progenitor of the Negroes), that this line of Ham's descendants were so *weak in intellect* as to be unable to set up and maintain a government.

Again : on the assumption that, according to the curse on Canaan, Ham's descendants are doomed to bond-service, and Shem's descendants are to be blessed with the position and privilege of having slaves from the progeny of Ham, we have a right to expect to find the facts in history to correspond. Certainly, before consulting history, we shall not expect to find Shem's children in bondage, if God has said Canaan shall be Shem's slave. An apologist for slavery as a divine institution (Servitude, p. 9) says, "We find in times past the prophetic declarations of the Patriarch Noah have been fulfilled, and that the curse and blessing extend to our day, and are still in process of fulfillment, according to God's sure word." This writer quotes the venerable Dr. Mede as saying, "There never has been a son of Ham who has shaken a sceptre over the head of Japheth. Shem has subdued Japheth, and Japheth has subdued Shem ; but Ham has never subdued either." I would say to this apologist, it is not as he and Dr. Mede represent it. He is ignorant of history, or he willfully misrepresents it. It is astonishing that Dr. Mede should have said what is ascribed to him—"Ham never subdued either!" Shem never in bondage! Has Dr. Mede never read that the Hebrews were in bondage in Egypt hundreds of years? Egypt was the country of *Misraim*, the second son of Ham. The Hebrews were Shemites. Shemites were in slavery, and Hamites were their masters. "Melchizedek, whose name was expressive of his character—*king of righteousness* (or a righteous king)—was a worthy priest of the most high God; and Abimelech, whose name imports *parental king*, pleaded the integrity of his heart and the righteousness of his nation before God, and his plea was admitted. Yet, both these personages appear to have been Canaanites."—(*Bush*.) Melchizedek and Abimelech—*Canaanites*—among the most honorable names in sacred history! Consider how great Melchizedek (a Canaanite) was, unto whom even the princely Abraham (a Shemite) gave the tenth of the spoils! "Nimrod went to Asher, and built Nineveh;" and this he could

not have accomplished if he had not first subdued the descendants of Shem. Consider how great Nimrod—a *Cushite*—a *Hamite*—was, who shook a sceptre over the Shemites, and took their country! Thus we see that these words of Noah, if you attempt to apply them to the history of the branches of his family, are not verified in history. But God's word of prophecy cannot fail. Therefore Noah's curse on Canaan, and predictions as to Shem and Japheth, are his *guess*, founded, in part, by a knowledge of his children, and prompted as much by his incensed feelings. We cannot, in the light of history, receive these words as uttered by Noah when *moved by the Holy Ghost*, but as the hasty malediction of an incensed father, irritated both by his drunkenness and a feeling of indignation against that member of the family who had exposed his shame. It is not a pleasant duty thus to hold up the fall of our father, Noah. We desire not to do it in the spirit of Ham and Canaan. But we are in search of the truth, with a view to refute the perversion of the Scriptures by the oppressors of our fellow-men. There is additional proof that the curse and blessings in the 25th, 26th, 27th verses of the 9th chapter of Genesis, were *Noah's*, and not *Jehovah's*. In the first verse of this chapter, "God blessed Noah and his sons." Notice, it is—God blessed *all the sons* of Noah. But in these verses under consideration, we read it was NOAH—not God—who said, "Cursed be Canaan;" at the same time repeating, in substance, that Japheth and Shem had the Lord's blessing, and his own good wishes and expectations that they would do better in their own and in their family history than Canaan. It really seems that Noah had taken the responsibility of revoking the Lord's blessing, in part, which had been pronounced on *all his sons alike*. It is quite probable that slavery was at this time instituted, not by divine authority, but by parental authority,—*i. e.*, by Noah, in the spirit of revenge on Canaan. It is not improbable that this member of the family was from that time subject to the contempt and tyranny and oppression of his grandfather and uncles and cousins and brothers. It served him right, if it was so. It was a righteous retribution of God, for dishonoring the venerable Noah. But God's *providence* is not the same thing as a *divine institution*, or an *inspired prophecy*.