

# Maamarei Mordechai

הסבר לפי ממש פשוט

Parshas Noach 5785

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The Torah is a history book, of sorts.

וַיֹּאמֶר אֲרוּר כְּנָעַן עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים יִהְיֶה לְאָחָיו:

“And he said, ‘Cursed is Canaan; a servant among slaves he shall be to his brothers.’” (Bereishis 9:25).

Why did Noah curse Canaan? What does it mean to be a servant among slaves? Why is servant singular and slave plural? Which “brothers” is Canaan a slave to?

Reducing the Torah to a book of laws is cutting it short. Calling the Torah a history book is also missing the mark. The Torah does provide a good bit of world history and it also discusses a lot of the times it speaks of, including agriculture, botany, zoology, architecture, economics, and geopolitics. The Torah is corroborated by archeology, historical documents, and lore from around the world. However, the Torah minces no words. The Torah specifically focuses on this history: from Creation to His people becoming His nation. The lineages of Cain, Yishmael, and Esav are necessary tangents.

This week’s parsha portion answers two very important questions. First, why did the Land of Israel belong to Avraham and his children; and why it belongs for all time to the original indigenous people, Bnei Yisroel. Second, if much of archeology and historiography points to civilization commencing in eastern Africa, or at least it being the “cradle of civilization” how did so much of civilization end up in the middle east – as so much of the Torah talks about.

The pasuk quoted above refers to a very important change in geopolitical events. Just next week the parsha portion will convey how Hashem granted and promised the lands of Canaan to Avram and his descendants. Avram earned this land grant in part because of this pasuk. Noah left the *teiva* ark after the great deluge and was drunk and put himself in a delicate situation. (Ibid 9:21). Cham saw and informed his brothers. (Ibid 9:22). Shem and Yafes saved their father’s honor. (Ibid 9:23). וַיֵּדַע אֶת אֲשֶׁר-עָשָׂה לּוֹ בְּנוֹ הַקָּטָן. When Noah awoke “he knew all that was done to him by the son of his youngest.” (Ibid 9:24). The words are “his son to the smaller” means the son to him, his youngest. It was Cham’s youngest. The Torah says, “And the sons of Cham were...Canaan.” (Ibid 10:6). Canaan was the youngest of Noah’s youngest. Apparently, it was Canaan who did something to his grandfather to destroy his grandfather’s honor. It was so bad that Noah cursed Canaan; meaning he took away his inheritance.

The pasuk says that all that belonged to Canaan really belonged “his brothers.” Was it Canaan’s brothers? No, it was “his son to his youngest.” The “his” again goes onto Cham. Canaan was to be a slave and his descendants were to be slaves to Cham’s brothers. Just to be clear, the Torah says, וַיֹּאמֶר בְּרוּךְ הוּא אֱלֹהֵי שֵׁם וַיְהִי כְנָעַן עֶבֶד לָמוֹ: “And he said, blessed is Hashem, the Lord of Shem, and it will be that Canaan is his servant.” (Ibid

9:25). Therefore, all that belonged to Canaan belonged to Shem. While the Torah does not often talk about actual slaves, the double term “servant among slaves he shall be” makes it clear that just as slaves have no possessions, Canaan and his line shall not either.

Incidentally, this is what Mitzrayim did incorrectly. Mitzrayim was Canaan’s older brother. (Ibid 10:6). Mitzrayim often sought to take over the Land of Canaan, being that he was eldest and that the curse was that Canaan was to be the slave to his brothers. However, Mitzrayim was mistaken. While the curse only made Canaan subservient to his uncles—not his literal brothers—the right of heritage between the brothers still had to be settled. It was then settled by Noach giving the lands to Shem. It was further settled when Avram went to the Land. Terach was the eldest of the eldest, going back nine generations to Shem (ibid 11:24) and his eldest was Avram (ibid 11:26). Therefore, the Land belonged to Avram by right. This is the importance of the Torah giving the lineage.

The Torah also answers an important question. *עֲשֵׂה לְךָ תִּבְתָּ עֲצֵי-גֹפֶר*: “And you shall make it for yourself an ark of *gopher* tree wood.” (Ibid 6:14). Many meforshim and scholars wonder what gopher wood was. It perhaps could be an extinct tree. It can also be identified when learning context and syntax. The tree that was used would be best made of strong wood, from a tree that is easily converted to material, and from a tree that is tall and strong. It would also be best from a tree that was local and available.

The first clue to decipher gopher is in how words are converted into other languages. The name of items native to the area they are indigenous to often remain similar over the millennia. An easy example is camel. The word in the Torah is gamal. (Ibid 24:10). Gamal easily converts to camel. Another clue is how that word relates to others. It also means weened. (Ibid 21:8). This is reference to the child that no longer relies on the food from its mother, as a camel relies on the moisture stored in the fats of its hump. It also means the child getting over the figurative hump and being able to go out on its own, as a camel can go across the desert. This is also because each letter in Loshon Kodesh (ancient Hebrew) means something. Gimel means camel or foot; mem means water or chaos; lamed means staff or control. Putting it together, the camel or animal with large feet that carry water and control the chaos. That is a camel.

Gopher is the same. The word or even the shoshon (root) is not found elsewhere in tanakh. Its letters mean camel, mouth, and head. It is a tree that is large and tall and has the appearance of a camel’s head in appearance. It also grows on top of something that sounds like gopher. *גִּבְעָה* a similar sounding word, means small hill. (Ibid 49:26, Shmos 17:9). Geboah sounds like kope-ee. That word, koh-pee is similar sounding to *gopher*. Kopje, sounded out as kope-ee, means a small hill. The trees that grow on these small hills in eastern and central Africa are commiphora (easily seen as similar to gopher), which are 13 feet with easily strippable bark. Acacia tortilla, a similar species indigenous to the same area, grows 66 feet tall, 5-foot trunk circumference. Both species have an umbrella shape and from far they look like the profile of a camel hump and camel head.

Noach’s story beginning in central-eastern Africa makes a lot of sense historically and as to access to so many animals to board the teiva. Noach ended up in Ararat (eastern Turkey) and that is where the rest of Avraham’s story begins. The more we learn Torah the more the emes proves itself.