

ARTICLE IV.

EXPLANATION OF SOME PASSAGES IN GENESIS.

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I. GENESIS, NINTH CHAPTER, VERSES 25—27.

“AND he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth; and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem, and Canaan shall be his servant.”

It will be recollected that these words follow the account of the planting of a vineyard by Noah, his yielding to the temptation to drink of the wine and consequent exposure, and which his son Ham, father of Canaan, not only beheld but reported to others, whilst Shem and Japheth thoughtfully took measures to screen it from view. This conduct brought upon the transgressor, the curse of the father, contained in the 25th verse, and more particularly explained in the following verses, by contrasting the fate of his posterity with that of his brothers. We should expect to find Ham in the place of Canaan in these verses, and some versions have substituted that name, or have translated, as if the text were *וְהָיָה אֲבִי כְנָעַן*, but without critical authority. The 26th verse, in which Ham is called the father of Canaan, prepares the way for this verse, and the simple meaning is: that Ham shall be cursed in his posterity, the son bearing the iniquity of the father. The crime of Ham, according to oriental notions, was not a trivial one. “No greater offence could have been committed against him (Noah) than Ham, who was himself a man of mature years and had sons, committed in this case.” The laws of filial reverence and modesty in domestic intercourse, were in that early age regarded as sacred. The transgression was a domestic one, and so the punishment. When the penalty was inflicted upon the father, depriving him of the right of a son, his children naturally and necessarily suffer with him. Herder *Hebr. Poetry*, I. 221. *עֶבֶד עֲבָדִים*, servant of servants, that is, the *lowest servant*, the opposite of *אֲדֹנָי*, *אֲדֹנָי*, *אֲדֹנָי*, Comp. *Heb. Gram.* § 117. 2, and Ewald, § 488. — *וְיָשָׁב*, to his brothers, as is plain from what follows, Shem and Japheth.

In Shem and Japheth is plainly included their posterity, and hence the suffix pronoun *לָהֶם* (to them) at the end of the 26th verse is used

instead of יב, according to Grammar, § 101. 2. Expl. 1. Ewald, § 421.

Noah does not proceed directly to the blessing that he is to pronounce upon Shem, but foreseeing his future prosperity, he more vividly portrays it, by breaking forth in a song of praise to God, who is the author of this good fortune. A somewhat similar usage is found in such passages as 14: 20, Ex. 18: 10, 2 Sam. 18: 28. יהוה יהוה, Jehovah the *God of Shem*, the author of the blessings bestowed upon Shem. It should be noticed that Jehovah (יהוה) is only used in reference to Shem, to whose posterity, as the chosen people, he especially reveals himself by this name. See Tuch and Hengstenberg upon the passage.

The first clause in the 27th verse is more difficult of interpretation: נָשַׁבְתִּי לַיהוָה אֱלֹהִים; the paronomasia here between the first and last words at once meets the attention. This verb, נָשַׁבְתִּי, future Hiphil (Jussive) from נָשַׁב was undoubtedly chosen for the sake of the similarity of sound with נָשַׁב instead of a form of נָשַׁב with which it is here synonymous, although the primitive signification of נָשַׁב, to open, expand, is nearly the same, and this is the usual signification of the same verb in Aramaean. The latter verb followed by הַ as נָשַׁבְתִּי here, is translated in 26: 22, *made room for*, and that is the literal idea in the present passage: to place in a free, unrestricted position, i. e. to make prosperous, and it should be rendered as expressing a wish: see Grammar upon the Impf. (Future) Jussive, § 126. 2. “May God make room for Japheth.” So, in general, most of the ancient translations. The Sept. *πλάτύνει ὁ θεὸς τὴν Ἰάφεθ*: Vulg. *dilatet*; according to the Arab. of Saadi: *Beneficiat Deus Japheto*. Comp. also in the use of הַ, Is. 4: 2, 18: 20, et al. — נָשַׁבְתִּי בְּתֵּי שֵׁם “Let him dwell in the tents of Shem.” The object of בְּתֵּי שֵׁם is undoubtedly a pronoun referring to Japheth. The parallelism of members seems to require, that this verse should have regard to Japheth, as the preceding had respect to them; and besides, the last words of the verse: and “let Canaan be his servant,” are a useless repetition from the preceding verse. But a more decisive argument for this interpretation is as Hengstenberg (*Christology*, Vol. I. p. 44) indicates: As Noah intentionally used the name Jehovah in speaking of Shem, and Elohim in speaking of Japheth, the name would undoubtedly not have been left to be supplied by the reader. The word תֵּי is also variously interpreted. Some expositors, as Gesenius, Michaelis and others make it an appellative noun, meaning *name, illustrious name*, with נָשַׁבְתִּי “renowned habitations;” but there should be some good rea-

son for giving this word a totally different meaning here and in the preceding verse, and as none appears, we do not hesitate to render the clause: "and let him [Japheth] dwell in the tents of Shem," that is, let them be partakers with Shem in the blessings which are peculiarly his. The interpretation which makes this phrase mean that the posterity of Japheth shall sometime gain possession of the country of the posterity of Shem, and reduce them to subjection, is so much at variance with the context, which requires that the blessings of Japheth should be only subordinate or supplementary to those of Shem, that it needs no confutation.

The question naturally arises, what are the blessings desired and predicted, for the posterity of Shem, and in which Japheth is to be partaker? Von Bohlen, Tiele and others endeavor to make out a literal fulfilment in the temporal condition of the posterity of the three brothers, but the futility of this attempt is apparent on close inspection. Even Tuch, who cannot be accused of an undue partiality for the spiritual in interpretation, rejects their theories and says: "This declaration [referring to the clause, 'and Japheth shall dwell in the tents of Shem,'] goes back to the united act of filial piety of both brothers, and is intended to represent the ideal union in which at a subsequent time their posterity shall, as their progenitors now, be united, for a higher object. That is here first indicated in a more general way, which is distinctly declared in the subsequent history, chap. 12: 3, that the salvation of all nations shall proceed from the offspring of Shem, who, making Zion the common centre of their efforts, shall without distraction be united in the fear of the Lord."

This may be considered as the second stage in the revelation of the blessings which are to be bestowed upon the human race, and which shall have their consummation when the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be fully established in the earth. The most general declaration immediately followed the fall: "it (the seed of the woman) shall bruise the serpent's head," Gen. 3: 15. But here it is indicated, that the deliverance shall be wrought through the posterity of Shem; in chap. 12: 3, 18: 18, et al. it is declared that in Abraham of the lineage of Shem, shall all the families of the earth be blessed. The same is made to Isaac the son of Abraham, 26: 4, and to his son Jacob 28: 14, with which compare Zech. 12: 7 and Mal. 2: 12, where we find יהוה יי אלהינו, and אלהינו יי אלהינו corresponding to אלהינו יי אלהינו, in this passage of Genesis. And subsequently, as is well known, the promises became much more explicit and numerous. Comp. Isa. 2: 2—4, Zech. 14: 16 sq., Ps. 22: 26 sq., and Hengstenberg Christology, I. p.

25. In the Chaldee paraphrase of Jonathan, the interpretation which is given above, is recognized: "proselyti fient filii ejus et habitabunt in schola Semi." So Jerome, Augustine and others. Calvin explains these verses in substance as follows: "there shall be a temporary division between them and Japheth. Afterwards a time shall come when they will again be united into one body, and have a common abode. — Then the soas of Shem, of whom a greater part had scattered off and separated themselves from the sacred family, are to be collected together, in order that they may abide under the same tabernacle. People also of the stock of Japheth which had been a long time wandering and scattered about, are to be received into the same household. For God by a new adoption has made one people of different races, and has effected a fraternal union among those who were aliens," cf. 2: 14, 19.

II. GENESIS, TWENTIETH CHAPTER, VERSE 16.

"And unto Sarah he said, Behold I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver; behold he is to thee a covering of the eyes unto all that are with thee, and with all other: thus he was reproved."

The last part of the verse alone occasions any difficulty: Behold, אֲנִי הֵי אֵלֶיךָ not *he* referring to אֲנִי אֶתְּרִיךָ, thy brother, but *it*, that is, the thousand pieces of silver, shall be כֶּסֶף וְהָיָה עֵינַיִךָ, a covering of the eyes, a recompense or penalty both with thee and with all: רְגֵלֶיךָ, and thus justice is done thee. Abimelech, it is said in the 14th verse, made a present to Abraham of sheep and oxen and servants, when he restored him his wife, who had been called his sister. These seem to be given as an expiation for the wrong done him. But he is not satisfied with this; he says to Sarah, I have given thy brother a thousand pieces of silver, which shall be a recompense to you individually for the wrong done, and to others. It is plain from the whole narrative, that Abimelech did not, at least after the explanation in the 12th verse: "she is my sister," intend to impute any blame to Abraham and Sarah for what they had done. On the other hand, he seems to understand the injury is all on his part, and that it consequently behooves him to make the proper expiation. This consideration aids us in explaining the words, כֶּסֶף וְהָיָה עֵינַיִךָ, "a covering of the eyes;" for if it means, as Rosenmüller and others suppose, that Sarah shall make use of this money to buy her a veil, so that she by this means appear in future to be a married woman, and not deceive others as she had done Abimelech, the reproach would be palpable. And he-

sides, it yet needs proof that the veil was used in this early age as thus distinctive. See Gesenius Lexicon, under *בַּסִּיטָה*. We must, then, give another explanation of these words. And it seems to us that chap. 32: 21 leads to the correct interpretation here. *אֲכַסְתָּהוּ* *אֲכַסְתָּהוּ*, *סָיַר בְּמַכְתָּרוֹ*, "I will cover his face," (Eng. vers. appease him,) with the present. The original idea seems to be that of turning away the attention from, by means of a gift, and hence expiatory, so that the injury may no longer be seen. And injury or transgression according to the Biblical representation is before the person injured or concerned, so that he sees it, and when forgiven, it is covered, Ps. 85: 3, or cast behind their back, Isa. 38: 17, or what is equivalent, the eyes or face are covered, so that it is out of view. The Seventy seem to have rightly understood the passage under consideration, who render *ἵσταται σοι εἰς τιμὴν* (fine, penalty) *τοῦ προσώπου σου*. — But this expiation was not made for Sarah alone, but also for all who were concerned; hence the words *כָּל אֲשֶׁר אָחַז וְאֵת כָּל* "in respect to all that has happened with thee and with all." It is a matter of some question whether the word *וּלְכַתְּוֹתָ* is in the 2d or 3d pers. fem. praet. of Niphal, but probably the former. The meaning given to it is very various. Gesenius: "And she was convicted, had nothing to say in excuse." Rosenmüller: et "reprehensast;" but how this is consistent with the explanation that Gesenius gives of the preceding words, and with the spirit of the whole passage, is difficult to see. For, of what was Sarah convicted, or for what had she to render an excuse? We find that *יָדָה* in the Hiphil sometimes means to judge, to procure justice, and hence in the Niphal it may mean, to be judged, to have justice done one; and accordingly here: and recompense is made, or justice done thee. See De Wette's Translation, and Tuch's Commentary on Genesis.

III. GENESIS, FIFTIETH CHAPTER, VERSE 26.

"So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him in Egypt."

In the second verse of the same chapter, it is said: Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father, etc. These are the only instances in which embalming is spoken of in the Bible, and here the object is apparent, namely, to enable them to remove the bodies of the patriarchs from Egypt to the land of Canaan. The custom of embalming, as is well known, prevailed in Egypt even from a very early age; according to Rosellini, II. 3, mummies have

been found of the dates of the earliest kings. The office in the cases mentioned above, was performed by the physicians of Pharaoh, v. 2. The manner of embalming is described by Herodotus, 2. 86, and by Diodorus, 1. 91. The latter says generally: They prepare the body first with cedar oil and various other substances, more than thirty (according to another reading, forty) days; then, after they have added myrrh and cinnamon and other drugs, which have not only the power of preserving the body for a long time, but of imparting to it a pleasant odor, they commit it to the relatives of the deceased. According to Herodotus, the time employed in embalming was seventy days, the time during which they mourned for Jacob, and the forty days of the embalming, spoken of in verse 2d, relates to the time in which the body was kept in the salts of nitre, after the infusion of the spices, which completed the embalming. So that, when rightly understood, there is an agreement between the classical and biblical writers. Comp. "Egypt and the Books of Moses," p. 70 sq.

The phrase, "he was put into a coffin (קִרְיָן, a wooden chest) in Egypt, has been adduced as a proof that the author of the Book of Genesis was not familiar with Egyptian customs. But it proves, on the contrary, to be in accordance with Egyptian usage. For it is plain from various sources that wood was the common material for coffins, and basalt the exception. Herodotus says: "Now, the relatives take away the body (i. e. after the embalming) and make a wooden image in which they inclose it." And if this were not the case, a sufficient reason for preferring wood in this instance, arises from the injunction in the 25th verse: "Ye shall carry up my bones from hence," as the weight of stone would render the transference difficult.