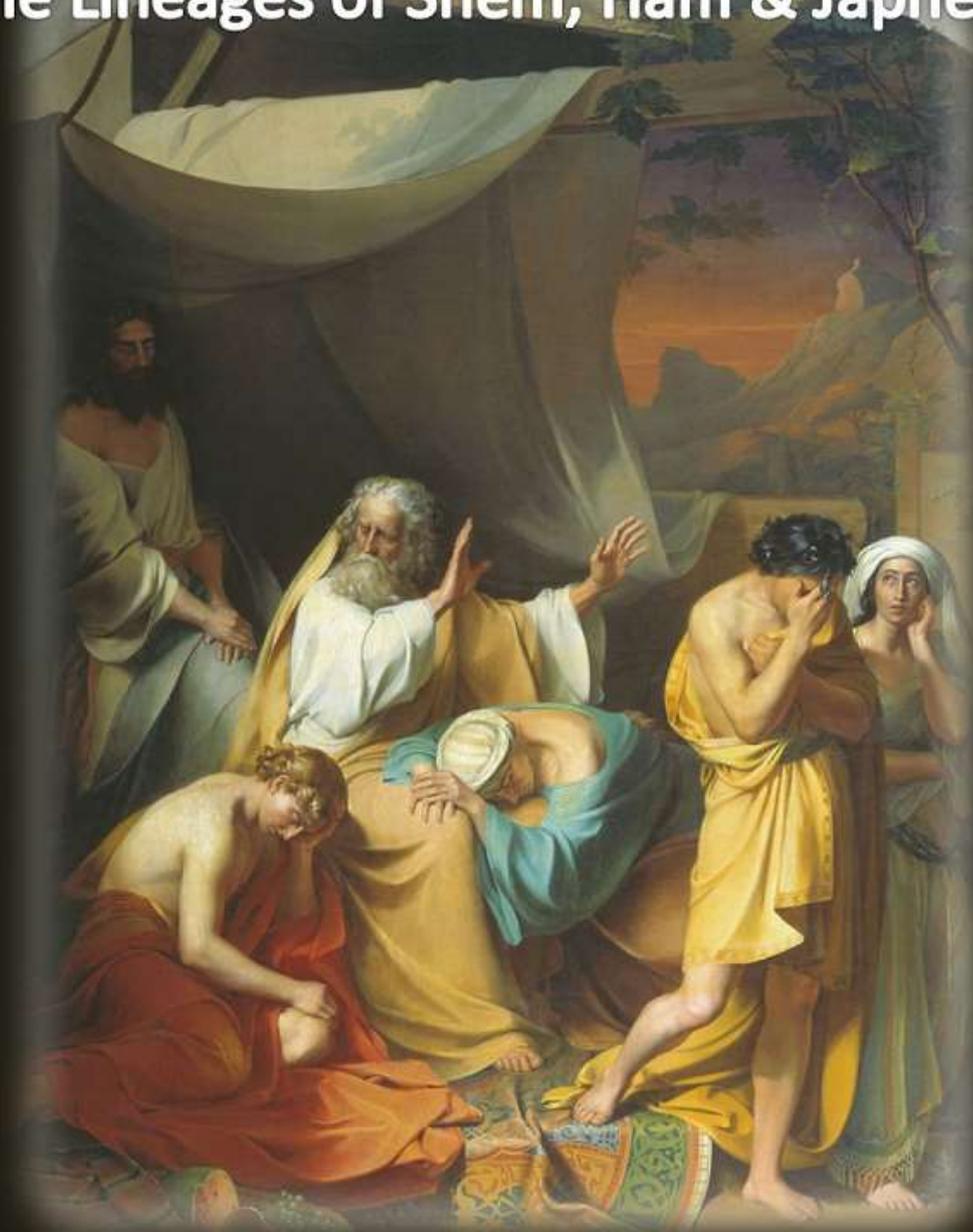


TOTAL DEPRAVITY VS UTTER DEPRAVITY

The Lineages of Shem, Ham & Japheth



Stephen Gunawan



After the account of the Flood, we are told how Noah's descendants very quickly showed their depravity, especially Ham. This goes to show that despite being spared from judgment of the Flood, Noah's family was not completely righteous. They were just not utterly deprived with evil yet. And this is just consistent with the biblical doctrine that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (**Rom 3:23**). It is interesting to note, though, that Noah did live exceptionally righteously (although not sinless), and he is mentioned alongside of Daniel and Job as those with no express record of error (**Eze 14:14, 20**).

Right after the Flood we find a very strange occurrence where Noah was given to drunkenness, was exposed to nakedness, which was seen by his son Ham, and cursed Ham for not covering his nakedness; after which the story of Noah ended abruptly (**Gen 9:20-29**). When looked at its surface this story was very strange, not only for the fact that it seemed strange to curse Ham's son Canaan for an action that seemed rather trivial. Some commentators have actually given the possibility that there had been a motive for homosexual conduct on the part of Ham (see comment for explanation)¹. Even after the whole earth had been cleansed of sinful men, old habits die hard, and we immediately see sinful behaviors. This proves that the seed of the serpent did not end with the death of Cain's descendants in the flood; and therefore both the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman was not meant to be understood to be merely biological in nature.

But the increase of evil continued, and we see in chapters 10-11 another story of depravity and evil. Now, I need to explain first that chapters 10–11 is not arranged chronologically, because in chapter 11, the whole world still spoke in one common language (**11:1**) and had not yet scattered (**11:4**) but yet repeatedly in chapter 10 we are given the narration of how the descendants of Noah scattered, each with its own language (**10:5; 10:18-20; 10:30-31** and **10:32**). Rather, it is arranged in a chiasmic manner; within which the account of the Tower of Babel is sandwiched between two accounts of genealogies. This means that the story of the Tower of Babel is the focal theme which is explained by the two genealogical accounts.

Toledoth (i) The Hamites

I would like to bring our attention to two lineages of the two sons of Noah. The first is that of Ham, who was earlier cursed by Noah for his indecent act. In the line of Ham, there would be a famously mighty warrior by the name of Nimrod. In fact, so mighty was Nimrod, that there was a saying in their days, "*like Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the LORD*" (**10:9**). At first glance, such a description is very flattering; but that's before we consider its context. Nimrod is pictured here as the founder of the city of Babel, and his earliest work began in those perimeter (**10:10**). Now, for such an influential figure to be described as the leader of the very city that initiated a great rebellion against God arouses suspicion. Furthermore, Nimrod's name (נמרד) probably came from the word *marad*ⁱⁱ (מרד), which means "we shall rebel." And the term "mighty" was the Hebrew *gibbor*ⁱⁱⁱ (גבור), which can also mean "strong man" or "tyrant." The historian Josephus even said this of him:

Now it was Nimrod who excited them to such an affront and contempt of God. He was the grandson of Ham, the son of Noah—a bold man, and of great strength of hand. He persuaded them not to ascribe it to God, as if it were through his means they were happy, but to believe that it was their own courage which procured that happiness. He also gradually changed the government into tyranny—seeing no other way of turning men from the fear of God, but to bring them into a constant dependence upon his own power.

He also said he would be revenged on God, if he should have a mind to drown the world again; for that he would build a tower too high for the waters to be able to reach; and that he would avenge himself on God for destroying their forefathers! (Ant. I: iv: 2)

Now, despite the fact that Josephus is an extra-biblical source, nevertheless the context with which he is described, I believe, gives warrant to the description of him being the one who initiated the rebellion of Babel. And I shall explain in this article how the Bible's symbolism of Babylon is eerily similar to Josephus' description of Nimrod. And the title "a mighty hunter before the Lord" could be more accurately interpreted as "a tyrannical hunter who sets himself up before the presence of the Lord," thereby describing vividly a powerful man's intent to challenge God's authority.

Yet, the Bible reveals that the Hamites were hardly alone in their rebellion against God. The whole of the (relatively) small and undiversified community discussed with each other and made the consensus to do four things: ① Organize themselves (build a city) ② Usurp God's authority (build a tower) ③ Seek glory (make a name) ④ Disobey God's mandate (refuse scattering). Now, this intent goes against the very mandate God had given, which was to fill the earth (which presumes scattering) and rule over it for the glory of God. So, the shortest description of what they were trying to do was to resist God's very will and purpose for their lives. And we see that the chosen lineage, the Semites (from which we get the word Semitism, really) was part of this plot, and they too had their languages confused so they would disperse (**10:31**).



And so began a huge project of building a city that would reflect the glory of man. And by the way, this was the first and most widespread unity that is ever described in the Bible; and look at its purpose. So much for striving for unity without the Spirit of Truth! Lesson learned: There can be no true unity without God's unifying truth.

*There can be no true unity
without God's unifying truth*

Next comes a proclamation from God that bewildered me initially. God actually admitted that if the people were so unified, they will actually be able to achieve what they set out to do (**11:6**). Now, this is the sort of thing that causes people to mock at the Bible and say that it is made up of primitive myths. The people were thinking, "if we build a tower high enough, and it reaches to the skies, we will get to where God resides." And the astronauts of this age would say, "We've done that already and we don't find God above the clouds. These people were merely gullible and primitive to think they could do that!" So how could God acknowledge that they could achieve this intent?

Well, aside from the explanation that the revelation concerning God is herein using "baby talk" - using expressions that can be perceived even by the primitive people of the time; the language used was also very sarcastic. Although it seems as if God acknowledged the possibility of success, but the narrator also describes it rather comically. This tower, this pride of man, which reached to the heavens, was so tall that God had to physically come down to see what they were bulding; as it was so puny from where He was (**11:5**). We should see this really as a language of sarcasm, a common literary technique we are acquainted with.

*They are ready, and in fact
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that does away with the
need for God*

What was indeed possible, had God not intervened by breaking up the false unity, was that the evil would quickly descend into the same utter wickedness that had caused God to bring the judgment of the Flood not so long before. Nimrod's arrogance and ambition if left unbridled would quickly turn into false confidence that they were capable enough to denounce their need of, and reliance upon, God. For such is the nature of sinful man, past or present. We who are living in a scientific age show no difference to the arrogance of Nimrod. The advancement of science, as you can witness, has been anything but neutral. Mankind have been cooking up various theories, and rallied under such mighty names as Darwin, or Nietzsche, or more presently Dawkins - and they are ready, and in fact eager, to

accept ANY theory that does away with the need for God. And by any, I mean any. Scientists have become science-fiction writers who cook up plausible stories to explain reality. Take for example Dawkins' belief that life on earth was seeded by aliens^{iv}. Or Hawking's fear of the Artificial Intelligence overtaking humanity ala *The Terminator*^v. All they care about is gathering up as many false teachers as possible to teach them what their itching ears want to hear (see **2 Tim 4:3**). Take God away and morality becomes relative, and we can be free to design our own world. But what they don't realize is that our sinfulness will guarantee that this effort will cause mankind to fall into the descent to evil, every single time. In modern history, we have seen this happen. Darwin's theory of evolution (despite the fact that it had never been scientifically proven) was accepted too quickly as being factual not because it was sound, but more because it suited man's inner desire to dethrone God. But as historian Richard Weikart had analyzed, it was Darwin's theory of natural selection that inspired Francis Galton's theory of Eugenics; and both of these philosophies were greatly contributive for Adolf Hitler to justify his horrendous actions. After all, if nature runs on the survival of the fittest, and if men are not created equal; then eradicating a certain group of inferior and handicapped beings is merely the same utilitarianism we see when we kill cows for steak!

And so, I maintain that it was because of grace that God confused the language of the people, so that they were restrained in their path to utter wickedness. You see, sin ensures that when man naturally band together, it will always be in their evil inclinations. And language, as a tool for understanding, knowledge, control and consensus, was now a dangerously misused gift. Their ability to understand each other perfectly is now used to communicate and elevate their sinful desires. And for this very reason, in designing true unity, Christ first comes with a sword to divide (**Matt 10:34-35**). But when for once the saints of God gathers in seeking for the will of God, the sign that God then gave at Pentecost was the temporary lifting of the differences of languages; and for once the people all understood what was being preached without the barrier of lingual differences (**Acts 2:5-12**).

*In designing true unity,
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I will mention this only briefly so we won't go off topic. But we see here how words (or definitions of a word) actually unify, or divide. We've had many levels of division, from petty squabbles to legal battles that stemmed from a different understanding of the same word. And it is for this very reason also that the Word of God plays a central role in reforming our worldview so that our mind and understanding is brought under the submission to Christ.



The Symbolism of Babylon and its Antithesis

One other thing that is quite interesting to note is how the Bible continues with the story of Babylon, despite having halted its unified construction. And despite the fact that the Babylonian empire had vanished from history, it continues to be referred to in the Book of Revelation. And so, understanding the true meaning of Babylon is arguably more important than understanding the historic physical city. Well, for brevity's sake, here's the common theme I found in the Bible whenever Babylon is mentioned:

1. **Its Greatness.** Right from its spectacular beginnings by the mighty Nimrod, all the way to its repetitive description as Babylon the Great in the Book of Revelation (**Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2; 18:10; 18:21**) we see it being described in its mightiness. Babylon is self-made; a chronicle of human merit and prowess.
2. **Its Defiance to Authority.** Right from its builders' defiance to God's mandate, to its queer description in Isaiah and the Book of Revelation, Babylon is pictured as one who rejected and fought against authority. I'll explain why. The Books of Isaiah and Revelation refer to Babylon in a feminine form. In the Book of Revelation, there are two women that are described as polar opposites. One was the bride of Christ (eg. **Rev 19:7; 21:2; 21:9**) who was pure and submissive to her Bridegroom. The other was Babylon the mother of prostitutes who was impure and unclean (**18:2**), who did not submit herself under the authority of one husband but rather adulterously prostituted herself to many (**14:8; 17:5**). The difference, really, is in the attitude of submission (or the refusal thereof) to Jesus Christ, who rightfully demands it (and which is also referred to with the allusion of the husband-wife relations as in **Eph 5:21-32**). It is no wonder, then, that Isaiah portrayed Babylon as a queen, as one vying for power and making herself equal to God (**Isa 47:7-8**).
3. **Its Attempt to Usurp Power.** Right from its builders' intent to reach for the heavens, to Isaiah's prophetic description of Babylon as trying to vie for the very throne of God; Babylon has consistently been described as an undying desire to be like God. In **Isaiah 47**, Babylon calls itself the eternal queen (**47:7**), and arrogantly say of herself "*I am, and there is none beside me*" (**47:8**) which clearly mimics God's rightful proclamation of eternal divinity. Note point (2) for explanation of its description with the feminine form. And **Isaiah 14** which prophecies the fall of Babylon has been numerously used as a parallel description to the fall of Satan! But see how it also is a fitting description of what it could mean to fall from a usurping tower. **14:12** describes a fall from the high place of heaven, which the tower claimed to reach. **14:13** mirrors the tower builders' desire to reach for God, and if so describes also the true intent of the high tower; which was to be like the Most High (**14:14**).
4. **Its Organized Nature.** Babylon as it was founded was perhaps the first organized politics that attempted to unify the multitudes for a common purpose. A city, a kingdom that systematically organizes itself for the purpose of resistance against the will of God. Babylon is built on the very ideal that the will of God shall not be done; its tower is a petition for the will of man to be done in heaven as it is on earth. And therefore, the Bible puts the City of Babylon as an antithesis to the City of Jerusalem. The former is the city of man; the latter the city of God. **Hebrews 11** explains that Abraham was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder was God (**11:10**). It also explains that God is preparing for the people of faith a heavenly city and a heavenly country (**11:16**). And we will see this fulfillment in the unveiling of the New Jerusalem, the Holy City where the God will dwell with his people and be our God (**Rev 21:1-3**).
5. **Its Ultimate Destiny of Destruction.** In Genesis the building of the city and its adulterous ideals was scoffed by God, and then halted by God. It was from its very inception a futile attempt, which God mercifully hindered. Isaiah then prophesied against Babylon, proclaiming its eventual doom (**Isa 14; 21:9**). John in the Book of Revelation writes of its fall (**Rev 14:8; 18:2; 18:10**) its receipt of the wrath of God (**16:19**) and this time the finality of its demise (**18:21**).

Babylon's... tower is a petition for the will of man to be done in heaven as it is on earth

I have mentioned briefly in Point (4) how Babylon as an organized city is contrasted to Jerusalem. Let me then explain how the foretaste of the physical Babylon is contrasted to that of the spiritual Jerusalem.

Tower of Babel		Pentecost	
Place	Babylon	Place	Jerusalem (Acts 1:4)
Unity	Under man (Nimrod)	Unity	Under God (2:1)
Activity	Organizing to rebel	Activity	Organizing to witness (1:12-26)
Motive	Usurp God's authority	Motive	Obey God's comand to wait (1:4)
Servitude	Seek self-glory	Servitude	Glorify God by becoming His witnesses (1:8)
Authority	Self power and might	Authority	Power from the Spirit (1:8)
Mandate	Resisted the Cultural Mandate	Mandate	Obedied the Gospel Mandate
Destiny	Destruction	Destiny	Salvation (2:21)



Can you see the contrast? In the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came, all the believers were of one heart, praying in one place for the will of God to be fulfilled in their lives. They were seeking after God's glory, were reliant upon His power, were obedient to His commandment. And from thence, they shall indeed scatter as witnesses, to fulfill the mandate of the Gospel; and from whence the number of disciples were multiplied as the Lord added to their numbers those who were being saved. Babylon is thus the antithesis of Jerusalem^{vi}.

*Babylon is the
antithesis of
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Babylon stood for the continued resistance against God's will; of using God's gifts against Him; a seeking after self-glory; a vying for the very throne of God. It bears so much resemblance to the work of Satan and of the anti-Christ, and predictably so, because the whole world and its system is under the control of the evil one (**1 Jn 5:19**). Nimrod might have built the first Babylon; but its spiritual corruption characterizes man's organized (but futile) rebellion against God in every corner of history. And its consummation shall be its final destruction (**Rev 18:21**). In contrast, Jerusalem, within which was Mount Zion, stood for the place where God is enthroned (eg. **Ps 2:6; 9:11**) and where He is glorified and exalted above the nations (eg. **Ps 102:21; 99:2**) and from whence salvation would come forth (eg. **Ps 14:7; 53:6**). And Zion will ultimately be rebuilt (**Ps 102:6**) and in its consummation will be when we are finally truly united with Christ as his bride (**Rev 21:2**), where we would glorify Him and enjoy him forever.

Toledoth (ii) The Semites

The second genealogy we need to pay careful attention to is the genealogy of the descendants of Shem. Japheth's lineage is important to show how the Indo-European nations are their descendants. But Shem's lineage is the chosen Messianic lineage that would eventually climax in the birth of Christ.

The genealogies of Genesis 10 intended to show how the nations grew out of the sons of Noah, and how they eventually scattered to the whole earth as God had intended; despite man's resistance as told in Genesis 11. Chapter 11 then proceeds by retelling the genealogy of Shem, but this time with a different purpose. It is worth noting that the genealogy of the Semites in **Gen 11:10-26** is written in the same exact style and pattern as the genealogy of **Genesis 5**. And both have this purpose: to trace the lineage of the chosen seed. The story has gone from the general (sons of Noah) to the specific (Shem, the chosen line).

Despite being the chosen line, Shem's line wasn't exactly faultless. We know that they were included in the conspiracy of the Tower of Babel. And down the line, Abraham's father and his community had already degraded to being idol-worshippers (**Jos 24:2**). This was disturbing, especially when we know that Shem was in fact still alive in the times of Terah (and even Abraham). See table below for its calculation.

Name	Age before 1st son	Remaining life	Total	Average life expectancy
Shem	100	500	600	600
Arphaxad	35	403	438	400
Shelah	30	403	433	
Eber	34	430	464	
Peleg	30	209	239	200
Reu	32	207	239	
Serug	30	200	230	
Nahor	29	119	148	
Terah	70	135	205	
	290 Years			

Table 1: The Ages of the Semites. Note that Shem lived an additional 500 years after his firstborn son, whilst it took only 290 years to the birth of Abram, concluding that Shem was still alive at the time of Terah, and even Abram. (note also the decreasing life expectancy)

So, once again we see that the sons of Noah were not exactly blameless people. And although the Semites were of better character than the Hamites, they were still caught up in the overwhelming generational degradation of morality. But God preserved a remnant.



And it leads to... Abraham

Why are we given so much detail in the genealogy of Shem? It is because of who comes next: Abram. Shem's line was preserved because it will be the line through which Abraham would be born; and Abraham was important because it will be the Messianic line through which Jesus Christ would be born.

There are two possible states of morality that mankind is heading into... Utter depravity... Or the fullness of Christ

In such stark picture of the world, where again and again morality degrades, we are given such a prevalent nature of sin and fallenness. And if we take the New Testament description of such state, of such separation from God, this would be it: "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12). Such is the state of death in sin: We are separated from God, excluded from promise, and thus, plainly void of hope. In such a state, (that is, without the promise of God through covenant), man can never hope to escape the corruption of the world caused by evil desires (2 Pet 1:4).

And this is the understanding of the term *Total Depravity*. Man is so totally separated from God, so totally enslaved by sin, that he cannot choose the good that can be found only in God; but rather be bound to the degree of decay (Rom 8:21) both physically and spiritually. And it is here that I need to explain the terminologies that I have used. Notice that when describing the state of morality in the time of Noah, I repeatedly use the term "utterly deprived." RC Sproul had differentiated the term by explaining it this way. Although man is *Totally Depraved* by sin, which means gives him the inclination to evil in any and every area of his life; most are not *Utterly Depraved*, as in he's not the worst sinner that he could be. Not every sinner behaves as Adolf Hitler, and some can even retain a resemblance to kindness and have an ideology of goodness. But when we see the description of the people in the times of Noah, we see utter depravity: "the Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time... the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence" (Gen 6:5, 11). The Semites had to be saved, lest they descend into utter depravity again. And God had preserved for Himself a remnant in the person of Abram.

The greatest evil is most often done in the guise of good

Utter Depravity VS Fullness of Christ

As a close, before our lesson proceeds to the life of Abraham, I would just like to mention this. There are two possible states of morality that mankind is heading into; and only two. One, as I have shown in this lesson, is the state of utter depravity, which is the climax of evil. It may take a few generations, but morality tends to always degenerate because of our fallen nature. As we go through the Bible stories chronologically, you are going to see that this degradation is a trend. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah; the Israelites in the days of the Judges show exactly the same symptoms as the people in the days of Noah. And I will one day explain this, but despite the sophistication and apparent civility of modern society, we are heading towards the same direction, and are in fact pretty close to utter depravity. Perhaps for now I need to remind that the greatest evil is most often done in the guise of good.

And this is exactly why the work of Christ is not optional. Because faith in Jesus Christ is the only other possibility, the only other destination man can hope to have. The climax of good is the righteousness of God as revealed in Christ. Christ, in whom all the fullness of the Deity is incarnated in the flesh (Col 2:9) becomes God's ultimate revelation of Himself to man. And we who are Christians are predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), and one day we shall attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). It will NOT be by works, but still by faith; but genuine faith in Christ will indeed transform us to be increasingly like Him. It is a righteousness by faith. It will be a journey that is from faith to faith, or by faith from first to last (Rom 1:17). And that is what we are going to learn next from the life of Abraham.

Soli Deo Gloria!



ⁱ I put here an explanation by Bruce L. Gerig (2005) taken from <http://epistle.us/hbarticles/secrets.html> :
It should be noted that there are three words for "naked" used in the OT: **arom** (Strong #6174), **erom** (#5903), and **erwa** (#6172) – the third one (found in this passage) "associated with sexuality" and referring especially to the genitals. It may be noted that the phrase "uncover nakedness [**gala erwa**]" is often used in the OT as a sexual euphemism indicating illicit sex or rape. This expression for sexual union is used throughout the incest prohibitions in Lev 18:1-18, 20:17-21,9 where, for example, we read: "If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and **sees her nakedness**, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people; he has **uncovered** his sister's **nakedness**, he shall be subject to punishment." (20:17, NRSV) Notice the parallelism here between "seeing nakedness" and "uncovering nakedness," both inferring "having sex with." Because of a different context, "seeing" and "uncovered" in the Noah story do not prove that Ham had sex with Noah – but they do suggest some possible link between "nakedness" (**erwa** = genitals) and looking and sex in this story.

ⁱⁱ Strong's #4775

ⁱⁱⁱ Strong's #1368

^{iv} As was exposed in Ben Stein's interview of Richard Dawkins in the 2008 movie "*Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*"

^v One of such comment in the 2014 article <http://www.inquisitr.com/1659118/stephen-hawking-fears-terminator-genisys-will-come-true-why-the-human-brain-still-beats-supercomputers/>

^{vi} I will put this as an endnote instead of in the main article lest we get sidetracked. But it is interesting to note that throughout history God even use Babylon as a tool of judgment for Israel (eg. **Jer 21:3-10; 25:8-10**). In that capacity, even Babylon and its King became a tool in the hands of God, and indeed His "servant" (**Jer 25:9**). However, this does not mean that Babylon becomes a nation of virtue, for when the judgment has ended, God will still destroy that nation for the evil it has done (**25:12-14**). For indeed, as Isaiah explained, the defeat of Israel was God giving them over to the Babylonians, ut they were still blamed for the cruel and evil ways they treated the Israelites (**Isa 47:6**). Once again, that the evil that they did were used by God as a tool in His hand should not excuse them from responsibility. We should continually revert to the principle of **Gen 50:20**, that evil men intend their deeds for evil, and are thus responsible for their actions. However, God in His wisdom and omnipotence uses that to work things out for the good of the elect (**Rom 8:28**).

