

BLACK SLAVERY AS 'THE CURSE OF HAM'— Bible Truth, Jewish Myth or Racist Apologetic?

*"And Noah said 'Cursed be Canaan! A slave of slaves, a slave to his brothers!
Blessed be God, the God of Shem, but Canaan shall be his slave.
God prosper Japheth...But Canaan shall be his slave'." (Gen., 9:25-27 Message)¹*

Bro. Witness Lee (1905-1997) was an outstanding Bible teacher. His prodigious output of publications testifies to his ability as an expositor of Scripture. However, the "blended brothers'" *posthumous* exaltation of Witness Lee as the unique² "Minister of the Age" conferred upon him virtual infallibility. They assert that W. Lee's³ "ministry of the age subsumes and includes all the foregoing ministries. The whole New Testament ministry has been recovered..." His writings are ascribed a status equal to the Holy Scriptures, if not higher. To adherents W. Lee's exposition of Scripture is the "Interpreted Word,"⁴ virtually inerrant, containing the Bible's definitive interpretation. Given the undisputed primacy attributed to the "Ministry of the Age," other interpretations (even on non-essentials) are not tolerated in the Lord's recovery. "It is impossible for there to be different interpretations of the Scriptures..." LSM's "blended brothers" assert,⁵ "Interpretational differences prove that some members have problems with the Head and are not under the Head." Consequently LSM's publication of the "gold bar"⁶—the Recovery version of the Bible, enshrining W. Lee's teaching in its footnotes,⁷ was hailed as the "canonization of the Interpreted Word," an historic event on a par with the "canonization" of Scripture at the Council of Carthage in AD 397!

These extravagant claims contrast starkly with the view espoused by most evangelical believers. They regard the Bible as the unique canon⁸ and the only standard for evaluating all Christian teaching. Moreover, evangelicals claim their "divine right," under the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 1:9; Rev. 1:6) to personally interpret Scripture themselves⁹ under the Holy Spirit's guidance (Heb. 8:11; 1 John 2:27). In contrast to Roman Catholics, they reject the notion that any minister or group of ministers has a monopoly on the correct interpretation of Scripture.¹⁰ Furthermore Scriptural interpretation is an on-going process. It is always true that "the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from His Word." (Hymns #817) Hence, only the Bible itself is infallible; no Scriptural exposition is regarded as inerrant, nor is any equal to Scripture. Therefore mainstream evangelical believers categorically reject claims by LSM's "blended brothers" that Witness Lee is the "Minister of the Age" and that his writings constitute the definitive exposition, the "canonized Interpreted Word."

Rather than discuss these competing views in the abstract, we focus here on one example of Witness Lee's teaching—his interpretation of Noah's cursing of Ham (Gen. 9.) He expounds this event in terms of the genesis of various ethnic-racial groups of mankind. Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth are taken as the forefathers of the Jews, Black-Africans and Europeans. **Two controversial implications are drawn—[1] Noah's cursing of Ham is described as a curse on Black people and [2] the slavery of Black-Africans is regarded as a fulfillment of this prophetic curse.** To some these points may seem trivial; yet to many Black people and believers with African roots these are important topics. We ask—Is this Bible truth? Is this exposition the definitive interpretation which ought to be accepted without question, since it comes from the "Minister of the Age"? Or, is this interpretation a carry-over of Medieval Jewish myths and/or the remnants of a discredited "scriptural" justification for black slavery? Put differently, is this explanation of ethnic and racial origins the product of proper biblical *exegesis*—"cutting straight the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15)? Or is it the result of *eisegesis*—reading into the Bible a meaning foreign to the text?

Noah's Blessing & Curse—Prophecy concerning Jews, Blacks & Europeans?

Genesis 9 narrates events after the flood; Noah planted a vineyard, made wine, became drunk and "uncovered himself in his tent." Ham saw his father's nakedness and broadcast his parent's failure to his brothers who discretely covered their father. W. Lee says,¹¹ "Noah's failure was a test to his sons. From the same test, one received a curse and two received a blessing." Later, he repeats, "One of Noah's sons was cursed and the other two were blessed." (p. 448) Bro. Lee identifies Ham as the one cursed, saying, "Why was Ham cursed? Because he touched God's authority and became involved with God's government." (p. 445)

In discussing Noah's blessing and curse, W. Lee links Noah's sons to various racial and ethnic groups. He says, "According to history and geography, Shem, Noah's first son, was the forefather of the Hebrews, the Jews. Ham, his second son, was the forefather of the black people. Ham's son was Cush, the forefather of Ethiopia. Japheth, Noah's third son, was the forefather of the Europeans." (p. 448) Hence, Noah's three sons are identified as the ancestors of three ethnic-racial groups—the Jews, "black people," and "the Europeans." Moreover, Noah's speaking was prophetic, "Noah's curse and blessing were inspired by God...who exercises His government over mankind," W. Lee says (p. 448). He calls this "God's prophecy concerning mankind spoken through Noah." (p. 450)

Bro. Lee finds in history the fulfillment of Noah's "prophetic blessing;" the Europeans (including Americans,) signified by Japheth, have been expanding; God is the God of Shem (the Jews.) Concerning Noah's other son, W. Lee says "Ham has been cursed...he became a slave of slaves. Has this been proved by history or not? It has." (p. 450) Putting these statements together, he is saying "Ham...was the forefather of the black people." "Ham has been cursed...he became a slave of slaves." This has been proven by history—W. Lee asserts. According to "the Interpreted Word," black people are under Noah's prophetic curse and black slavery was the fulfillment of his curse upon Ham.

Nevertheless, Bro. Lee admonishes, "do not feel disappointed," because "our natural status has been changed by the salvation of God in Christ." (p. 450) This is exemplified by the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1) which included believers from diverse backgrounds. Thus, "the five great functioning members of the church in Antioch were composed of two Jews, descendants of Shem, [plus] one from Africa and one who might have been a black person, both of whom might have been descendants of Ham, and one...culturally related to...Japheth."(p. 450) W. Lee identifies Ham's two descendants in Antioch as [1] "Simeon was called Niger (which means black). From this designation, he might have been a Negro."¹² And [2] "Lucius of Cyrene was from Africa. Cyrene was a city in northern Africa, where Libya is today." Yet, regardless of their background, both were gifted members of the Antioch Church. Similarly, "Since we have been regenerated, we are all the church people. We were born of different origins, but now we are all in the same church." (p. 450) No doubt, in Christ, believers are a "new creation." Nevertheless, important questions are posed by this exposition.

Over thirty years have elapsed since this teaching on racial origins was presented to the Lord's recovery in N. America. In wider society this view is contentious because,¹³ "the Curse of Ham... has constituted one of the standard justifications for the degradation and enslavement of the African black in both South Africa and the American South." Surprisingly, despite its controversial elements (according to my knowledge) this teaching has never been questioned in the Lord's recovery. Important issues remain—are black people, by virtue of their natural status, under Noah's curse? Was the slavery of Afro-Americans sovereignly allowed by God to fulfill the "curse of Ham"? Is this view vulnerable to the charge that it implicitly condones black slavery as a historical necessity?

Are Blacks under Noah's Curse?

Let's re-examine this exposition. By far the most controversial elements are the twin assertions: [1] Blacks are under the "curse of Ham" and [2] the slavery of Afro-Americans was the fulfillment of Noah's curse. Is this conclusion the result of a straightforward *exegesis* of Scripture? Or is it the product of *eisegesis*—reading a preconceived concept into the divine text?

One basic point is that the Genesis record itself makes no reference to skin color or race. The Bible tells us Adam was the father of the whole human-kind (Acts 17:26); it does not explicitly tell us the genesis of various races. Any scriptural exposition of racial or ethnic origins relies on the expositor's interpretation and extrapolation of the biblical text. Significantly, W. Lee says, "According to history and geography, Shem...was the forefather of the Hebrews, the Jews. Ham...the forefather of the black people...Japheth...the forefather of the Europeans." The Scriptures themselves do not state this. Rather, it is the expositor's juxtaposing of "history and geography" with Scripture which generates these conclusions. Just as the laws of science cannot be derived from the Bible, it's also conceivable that the genesis of racial and ethnic groups cannot be deduced from Scripture. We pause to inquire—Are we asking questions of the Bible it's not designed to answer?

Who did Noah Curse—Ham, Canaan or Cush?

Turning to Genesis 9, there's an arresting asymmetry between Noah's blessing and his curse; he blessed Shem and Japheth; he did not curse Ham. Rather, Noah pronounced a curse on Ham's son, Canaan, saying, "*Cursed be Canaan: A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...Blessed be... Shem and let Canaan be his servant.*" Hence, strictly speaking, it is inaccurate to talk of "the curse of Ham." The "curse of Canaan" is the correct term. This is important because Ham had four sons: Cush is listed first and Canaan, last (Gen. 10:6.) W. Lee points out that "Ham's son was Cush, the forefather of Ethiopia." Scholars agree that "Cush" means "black." Hence many expositors concur with W. Lee that "Ham...was the forefather of the black people," through his son, Cush.¹⁴ Yet, Ham was the forefather of other peoples also—through his other sons. So why focus attention exclusively upon only one lineage—Ham's black descendants? Moreover, regardless of the ethnic origins or skin colors of the Cushites, the fact remains that **no curse is pronounced on either Ham or Cush**. The curse of servitude was pronounced on Canaan, another of Ham's sons. The Bible states clearly that Noah cursed Ham's fourth son, Canaan, not Ham's first son, Cush (the black, "Ethiopian.") **There is no Biblical justification for transposing Noah's curse from one of Ham's son to the other.**

The Old Testament indicates that Ham had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Put and Canaan (Gen. 10:6). According to scholars,¹⁵ Cush, Ham's oldest son represents the African tribes known as Ethiopians; Mizraim corresponds to Egypt; Put (or Phut) is linked by some to Somalia, by others to Libya. Lastly, Canaan¹⁶ "normally represents the land of Palestine and Phoenicia...the Old Testament... use[s] the term for inhabitants of the area in a general sense...These many tribes are in some way related to Canaan, and thus are called Canaanites." So "Ham is the ancestor of all these people from Phoenicia [through Palestine and Egypt] to Africa." It is an unjustified leap of logic to reassign Noah's curse away from Canaan to Ham (his father) or Cush, his black "Ethiopian" brother. The notion that Ham himself was black, originated in later rabbinical folklore. It is without Scriptural foundation. Hence expositors conclude¹⁷ "The reputed curse of Ham is not on Ham, but on Canaan, one of Ham's sons. This is not a racial but geographic referent. The Canaanites, typically associated with the region of the Levant (Palestine, Lebanon, etc) were later subjugated by the Hebrews when they left bondage in Egypt according to the Biblical narrative." Thus, these scholars conclude **the object of Noah's curse was not black people, but Canaan, the forefather of the Canaanites**. Noah's curse was fulfilled by the Hebrews' subjugation of the Canaanites. Canaan became "a slaves of slaves," when the Canaanites [e.g. the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:21, 27)] served the ex-slaves from Egypt, the Children of Israel. **Genesis provides no biblical support for the assertion that black people are under Noah's curse.**

Black Slavery as the 'Curse of Ham'—Bible Truth, Jewish Myth or Racist Apologetic?

When expounding Noah's curse, W. Lee refers to "the fulfillment of God's prophecy concerning mankind spoken through Noah." (p. 450) He identifies Ham as "the forefather of the black people" and elaborates by asserting, "Ham has been cursed...Under the curse, he became a slave of slaves. Has this been proved by history or not? It has." This implies black slavery is the fulfillment of Noah's prophetic curse. Yet, closer investigation suggests this interpretation is tenuous at best. Cush, the forefather of the black peoples, was not cursed by Noah; rather it was Canaan. Therefore, simple logic dictates that Noah's curse to be "*a slave of slaves, a slave to his brothers,*" does not apply to black people. The NIV Study Bible notes,¹⁸ "Noah's curse cannot be used to justify the enslavement of blacks, since most of Ham's descendants are known to be Caucasian, as the Canaanites certainly were (as shown by ancient paintings of the Canaanites discovered in Egypt)." We conclude that **Genesis provides no biblical basis, either ethically or prophetically, to justify black slavery.**

If black slavery is not a logical deduction from Genesis, where did this concept arise? Nowhere in Genesis do we find evidence that Ham was black. The tradition that Ham was a black man developed much later. It is a Rabbinical elaboration,¹⁹ not explicitly formulated until the Babylonian Talmud of 500 AD. Hence this concept belongs in the category of Jewish "myths and unending genealogies" (1 Tim.1:4). In the middle ages, European scholars of the Bible picked up on the Jewish Talmud idea that the "sons of Ham" were "blackened" by their sins.²⁰ These arguments became increasingly common during the slave trade of the 18th and 19th Centuries. A historian, Edith Sanders, concludes that the identification of Ham's descendants as Black Africans,²¹ "gained currency in the sixteenth century." Thereafter, it "persisted throughout the eighteenth century, [and] served as a rationale for slavery, using Biblical interpretations in support of its tenets. The image of the Negro

deteriorated in direct proportion to the growth of the importance of slavery." Benjamin Braude, Professor of history at Boston College, writes²² "in 18th and 19th century Euro-America, Genesis 9:18-27 became the curse of Ham, a foundation myth for collective degradation, conventionally trotted out as God's reason for condemning generations of dark-skinned peoples from Africa to slavery." Sadly this notion has been perpetuated through its uncritical repetition by Bible teachers and writers. However, today evangelical scholars reject this view as an out-dated remnant of folklore, masquerading as Scriptural truth. Others, perceiving the more sinister motive of a racist apologetic, denounce this notion as a²³ "false teaching...used to justify slavery and other non-Biblical, racist attitudes."

Black Africa—under Noah's Curse OR Source of 'the Man-Child'?

Witness Lee was an outstanding Bible teacher. His Life-studies stand as a monumental testimony to his gifts as an expositor of Scripture. This is more impressive since he was not an "armchair expositor," but labored practically to produce local churches throughout the globe. W. Lee was a gifted minister of Christ, an inspirational speaker and devotional writer. Yet he was not infallible.²⁴ He was not a systematic theologian, nor an academic historian. He testified of adopting teachings from prior generations, especially the Plymouth Brethren who emphasized Bible prophecy. Perhaps his view of Noah's curse as a prophecy concerning races was acquired from that source. In W. Lee's hands generally-accepted teachings were habitually reexamined in the light of Scripture. However, it seems this teaching about racial origins and black slavery, "slipped through the net" of critical re-evaluation. With W. Lee's passing, LSM's "blended brothers" are left with the uncomfortable fact that the "Interpreted Word," embodied in the "Life-studies," perpetuates a view of racial origins decisively rejected by evangelical scholars today. This teaching originates from fanciful rabbinical elaborations of Scripture rather than resulting from "cutting straight the Word of the truth." Moreover it was used by prejudiced scholars to justify black slavery in North America and elsewhere. This realization raises the issue—**will LSM's "blended brothers" now repudiate the twin teachings that [1] As a race, black people are under Noah's curse, and [2] Black slavery was the fulfillment of Noah's prophetic curse on Ham?** To do so would undermine the concept that W. Lee's teachings are virtually inerrant as the "Interpreted Word," the definitive Bible exposition by today's "Minister of the Age." However such an acknowledgment may remove a cause of stumbling to Afro-Americans. Even casual observation suggests that Afro-American believers are seriously under-represented in North American local churches affiliated with LSM. Moreover, in Africa, the development of the LSM-churches lags far behind the growth of evangelicals. Perhaps one "stone of stumbling," one under-lying cause of this under-representation, is this teaching regarding the genesis of the races. A decisive repudiation by LSM's "blended brothers" of this teaching concerning racial origins could help rectify this situation.

The Church in Antioch's leadership included diverse races, reflecting the fact that²⁵ "the church is composed of all races" and "spiritual gifts and functions...are not based on...natural status." Hence, W. Lee points out that "the five great functioning members...in Antioch were composed of two Jews.... [plus] one from Africa and one who might have been a black person, both...descendants of Ham, and one...related to...Japheth [European]." (p. 450) This suggests Antioch's leadership was 20-40% Black; 40% Jewish and 20% European (Caucasian?). Descendants from all three of Noah's sons were well represented. Contrast this with today's world-wide leadership in the Recovery. 63 "blended co-workers" signed the "Quarantine Letter" (Oct. 2006). We estimate over 50% of signatories are Caucasian; Over 40% are Asian, mostly Chinese. Significantly the Black race has only a token representative; only one brother was identified as Afro-American. This under-representation of black people was underscored by 3 American brothers (2 Chinese and one Caucasian) signing "Representing Africa"! The 63 "blended co-workers" claim to represent the whole Recovery, world-wide. However, racially they are Caucasian or Asian (Chinese). Nationally they are an American-Taiwanese group (73%). Apparently "grace has not overcome race" within today's Recovery as it did in early Antioch.

Interestingly Brazil's Bro. Yu-Lan Dong has propounded a different view concerning Black Africa. Based on a creative use of cartography, he suggested that Africa will produce "the Man-Child" of Revelation 12. Bro. Dong used the outlines of the continents to depict Europe and Asia as the Great Dragon (Satan,) North America as "the Eagle" and South America "the Wilderness." Africa is represented as a fetus. In this view, **rather than being under the "curse of Ham," Black Africa is blessed to bring forth the "Man-child"!** This turns W. Lee's interpretation on its head! This exposition is

attractive to Africa's Black population, making them the center of God's plan to produce overcomers! This may help explain why Bro. Dong's work is more successful than LSM's work in Africa. Indeed we wonder whether the "blended brothers" representing Africa (Bros. John Huang, James Lee & Dick Taylor) even mention LSM's teaching about Noah's curse when they minister in Africa! Needless to say, Bro. Dong has been severely rebuked²⁶ by LSM's "blended brothers" for "teaching differently" from the "Minister of the Age." We know of no convincing Biblical basis supporting Bro. Dong's view. His interpretation is based upon cartography, just as W. Lee's exposition is (in his words) "according to history and geography."

Finally we note that Living Stream Ministry publishes the journal *Affirmation & Critique*²⁷ "to refute and correct the defects and errors of traditional Christian theology." They claim "this publication reconsiders crucial aspects of Christian thought and practice..." Here we pose the question—**Is LSM willing to "reconsider this aspect of Christian thought"?** Perhaps they don't consider this issue "crucial." Nevertheless, to many Afro-Americans and Black Africans this is an important question, not lightly dismissed. Moreover, if needed, will LSM acknowledge and "correct the defects and errors" in their own theology about the Black race? Or have they set themselves on a pedestal beyond evaluation, impervious to correction by others, while they sit as judges critiquing the whole of Christianity?

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NOTES:

1. The Recovery Version reads: "And Noah said 'Cursed be Canaan: A servant of servants shall he be to his brothers...Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Shem and let Canaan be his servant. May God enlarge Japheth...and let Canaan be his servant.'" (Gen., 9:25-27 Rcv.)
2. Consider the following statements: "As many of us were under Brother Lee's ministry for years, even decades, no one can dispute the fact that **he was the minister of the age**, that he had the vision of the age..." (BP, *The Ministry*, vol.7, no. 6, August, 2003, p. 36, emphasis added.) "Brother Lee could not say it then, but we can say it today: He was the wise master builder; he was **the** minister of the age..." [RK, *The Ministry*, vol. 10, No. 1, (Jan./Feb. 2006) p. 150 (emphasis original)]
3. EM, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 2, Feb. 2005, p. 137. Further examples of the accolades heaped upon W. Lee's ministry are: "We thank the Lord for the ministry of the age which has reached the final stage to be **the all-inheriting ministry of the age** with the vision of the age." [DT, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 8, Sept. 2005, p. 34] "We need to declare to the whole universe that **the ministry we have been under is the apostles' teaching**. This is the ministry that is being released into the recovery today." [BP, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, #3, March 2005, p. 124] Note this last quote equates "the apostles' teaching" (the entire New Testament) with W. Lee's ministry ("the ministry we have been under".)
4. One example of the "blended brothers" use of the phrase "the interpreted word" is: "we must recommend the use of the Life-studies and the Recovery version. We need to spend time to dig into **the interpreted word of God**..." [Minoru Chen, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3, (March 2005) p. 55] In this context the role of the Life-studies and footnotes is emphasized; "We all need to be helped through the Life-studies and Recovery version with the footnotes to see the intrinsic significance of the word of the Bible. The collection of footnotes in the Recovery version is a precious gem. The practical way to be educated and thus to be reconstituted with the truth is with the tools of the Life-studies and Recovery version with the footnotes." [Minoru Chen, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3, (March 2005) p. 53] Consider also the following statements by LSM-President, Benson Phillips: "Today we have the Bible in our hands, but not many believers understand the Bible. It is closed to them. However, in the Lord's recovery, we have the Bible that has been properly translated. The recovery version is probably the best translation available. We also have the ministry of the age. Through the ministry of the age, the Lord has continued to further unveil His word. The ministers of the age have interpreted and given the sense that is in the Word. **Today we not only have the Bible; we also have the ministry that interprets the Word of God** and gives the sense of the Word." [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3 (March 2005) p. 117] Benson Phillips continues by making some striking exclusive claims: "In Nehemiah's time **they had the Word, and they had the interpretation**. They were given the sense of the Word, entering into its intrinsic significance. **Today we have the same. This takes place only in the Lord's recovery**. Everything in the publications circulated among Christians today is old. However, in our publications everything is new. The Word is opened; every page opens up the Word along with its intrinsic significance. Only here can it be said that there is such a deep and real opening of the Word." [Benson Phillips, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, No. 3 (March 2005) pp. 117-8]

5. RK, The Ministry, vol. 8, no. 7 p. 183. The quote, in context, reads: "When Christ is the Head practically in our experience, it is impossible for there to be different interpretations of the Scriptures. The Head is very clear. Interpretational differences prove that some members have problems with the Head and are not under the Head. Many brothers have spoken ardently concerning the ministry and the minister of the age. But recently I heard one young brother...who declared that Brother Lee was wrong on a certain point.... There is no point in even discussing differences because this and other things like it are a matter of the headship." Moreover, minor differences are alleged to be fatal in terms of "one accord." The "blended brothers" allege that "As long as we have different views on a minor point, we cannot have one accord (Phil. 3:15)....If one brother has a different view, even if it is on a minor point, we cannot have the one accord." (The Ministry, vol. 9, No. 2, Feb. 2005 p. 64) Such teachings tend to produce uniformity of scriptural interpretation, the accepted interpretation being Witness Lee's. This teaching on the impossibility of interpretational differences overlooks the fact that in this age of grace "we see through a mirror obscurely" (1 Cor. 13:12). Hence, what we discern may differ. Only in the next age will we see "face to face" (1 Cor. 13:12)
6. The term "gold bar" gained widespread currency when the 1st edition of the NT Recovery version was published by LSM. According to the understanding of some people in the recovery, Witness Lee had a "Midas touch," everything he touched turned to gold. Hence, the Recovery version, with his footnotes, became a "gold bar."
7. Consider the following recommendation: "Within this ultimate consummation everything is included. The footnotes in the Recovery Version of the Holy Bible are all-inclusive. The truth, the life, the light, the revelation, and the vision in these notes are inherited. These notes are not the work of one or two individuals. Every positive element of vision in the Scriptures is included in the up-to-date all-inheriting vision of the age. Thus there is no reason to go back." [RK, The Ministry, vol. 9, No. 8, Sept. 2005, p. 17]
8. This accords with Watchman Nee's famous assertion—"The Bible is our only standard. We are not afraid to preach the pure Word of the Bible, even if men oppose; but if it is not the Word of the Bible, we could never agree even if everyone approved of it." [W. Nee, The Christian, Issue No. 1, 1925, in Collected Works, vol. 7, p. 1231.] Thirty years ago the "Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery" declared, "All teachings...which claim the Holy Spirit as their source must be checked by God's revelation in His Word." [Quote from pp. 8-9 of The Beliefs and Practices of the Local Churches by "The Co-workers in the Lord's Recovery," published by LSM, 1978.]
9. A recently published book by Alister McGrath (Professor of Historical Theology at the University of Oxford) states, "The idea that lay at the heart of the 16th century Reformation...was that the Bible was capable of being understood by all Christian believers—and that they all have the right to interpret it and to insist upon their perspectives being taken seriously." [A. McGrath, Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution, Harper-Collins (2007), p.2] Professor McGrath links this concept to the "priesthood of all believers." He says, "Luther's radical doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers' empowered individual believers. It was a radical, dangerous idea that bypassed the idea that a centralized authority had the right to interpret the Bible. There was no centralized authority, no clerical monopoly on biblical interpretation." [McGrath, p. 3] Contrast this view with the statements quoted above (in footnote 4) by LSM-President, Benson Phillips: "Today we have the Bible in our hands, but not many believers understand the Bible. It is closed to them. However, in the Lord's recovery...Today we not only have the Bible; we also have the ministry that interprets the Word of God and gives the sense of the Word...In Nehemiah's time they had the Word, and they had the interpretation. They were given the sense of the Word, entering into its intrinsic significance. Today we have the same. This takes place only in the Lord's recovery." [Benson Phillips, The Ministry, vol. 9, No. 3 (March 2005) pp. 117-8, emphasis added]
10. This statement does not annul the role of God's servants (past and present) in unfolding God's Word to His people. McGrath quotes William Whitaker (1547-95) as presenting the "Protestant consensus when he stated, 'For we also say that the church is the interpreter of Scripture, and that the gift of interpretation resides only in the church: but we deny that it pertains to particular persons, or is tied to any particular see [i.e. the Pope] or a succession of men'." [A. McGrath, Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution, p.211, emphasis added.] The denial that "the gift of interpretation...pertains to particular persons...or a succession of men'," refutes the "blended brothers'" concept of successive "Ministers of the Age," just as much as Roman Catholic claims of Papal infallibility in Scriptural interpretation.
11. W. Lee, Life-study of Genesis, Message #33, p. 445. All subsequent quotes from W. Lee's exposition of Genesis are from this message, unless indicated otherwise.
12. W. Lee, Life-study of Genesis, Message 33, p. 450. It is unfortunate that both the Life-study of Genesis and Recovery version (footnote Acts 13:1) employ the racially-insensitive term--"Negro," rather than "black." Concerning the distinction, The Oxford English Dictionary says it was in "the late 1960s that *black* (or *Black*) gained its present status as a self-chosen ethnonym with strong connotations of racial pride, replacing the then-current *Negro* among Blacks and non-Blacks alike with remarkable speed. Equally significant is the degree to which *Negro* became discredited in the process, reflecting the profound changes taking place in the Black community during the tumultuous years of the civil rights and Black Power movements. ...*African American* achieved sudden prominence at the end of the 1980s when several Black leaders...championed it as an alternative ethnonym for Americans of African descent. The appeal of

this term is obvious, alluding as it does not to skin color but to an ethnicity constructed of geography, history, and culture, and it won rapid acceptance in the media alongside similar forms such as *Asian American*, *Hispanic American*, and *Italian American*. But unlike what happened a generation earlier, *African American* has shown little sign of displacing or discrediting *black*, which remains both popular and positive." ["Usage Note" The Oxford English Dictionary]

13. Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," William and Mary Quarterly, vol. LIV (Jan. 1997): 103–142, p. 103
14. The word "Cush" means "black" and direct references are made to Cushite and/or Ethiopian individuals in the Biblical narrative, such as the wife of Moses, Zerah the Ethiopian army commander (2 Chronicles 14:9-15) and Tirhakah, Cushite Pharaoh of Egypt (2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9). [Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10--Its Content," Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 138 (1980) pp. 22-34.]
15. See for example: Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10--Its Content," Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 138 (1980) pp. 22-34.
16. Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis 10--Its Content," Bibliotheca Sacra vol. 138 (1980) pp. 22-34
17. Goldenberg, David M. The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Princeton University Press, 2003 (New edition 2005).
18. It's worth quoting more of the NIV Study Bible's notes on Genesis 9:25 in their entirety: "**Cursed be Canaan!** ...This account of Noah's cursing and blessing of his sons is addressed to Israel. Most likely it is for this reason that Canaan is here singled out from Ham's descendants as the object of Noah's curse. Israel would experience firsthand the depth of Canaanite sin (see Lev 18:2-3, 6-30) and the harshness of God's judgment on it. In that judgment Noah's curse came to be fulfilled in the experience of this segment of Ham's descendants. But Ham's offspring, as listed in 10:6-13, included many of Israel's other long-term enemies (Egypt, Philistia, Assyria, Babylonia) who also experienced severe divine judgment because of their hostility to Israel and Israel's God. **Lowest of slaves.** **Joshua's subjection of the Gibeonites** (Jos. 9:21, 27) **is one of the fulfillments** (see also Jos 16:10; Jug 1:28, 30, 33, 35; 1 Ki 9:20-21). **Noah's curse cannot be used to justify the enslavement of blacks, since most of Ham's descendants are known to be Caucasian**, as the Canaanites certainly were (as shown by ancient paintings of the Canaanites discovered in Egypt)." [NIV Study Bible, Zondervan]
19. Ole Bjorn Rekdal, "When hypothesis becomes myth: the Iraqi origin of the Iraqw," Ethnology vol. 37 (1998): 17-32, p. 19. **Jewish scholars, working around the 6th century AD, introduced the idea that Ham was marked by dark skin.** From the Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 108b: "Our Rabbis taught...[that] **Ham was smitten in his skin.**" {Talmud Bavli, Sanhedrin 108b} James Fenton says from the "medieval versions [of these events] we learn more about the nature of Ham's misdeeds. He mocked Noah's nakedness, and invited his brothers to do the same (which they refused). What is more, **this is not the first of Ham's transgressions.** When they had all been on the Ark together, Noah had insisted that everyone be sexually continent, but Ham, by the aid of a magic demon, slept with his wife. Next day Noah saw his footprints, and there grew up an enmity between Noah and his son. **Ham was punished by being given a black skin.** When the world came to be divided up, Japheth received Europe, Shem got Asia, and Ham was awarded Africa." [James Fenton, Fenton, "A Short History of Anti-Hamitism," New York Review of Books (Feb. II, 1996), p.7] There is no scriptural basis for the notion that Noah enacted an ordinance of sexual abstinence on the Ark. This fiction is the invention of a religious legalistic mind! Professor Braude notes that there is **no black depiction of Ham appears in western art until the nineteenth or twentieth century.** This was much later than the tradition of depicting one of the "three wise men" as black. (ref. note 21 below)
20. The following are three examples of Medieval writers who make this extrapolation: **[1]** "Mar Ephrem the Syrian said: When Noah awoke and was told what Canaan did. . .Noah said, 'Cursed be Canaan and may God make **his face black**,' and immediately **the face of Canaan changed; so did of his father Ham**, and their white faces became black and dark and their color changed." Paul de Lagarde, Materialien zur Kritik und Geschichte des Pentateuchs (Leipzig, 1867), part II **[2]** The Eastern Christian work, the Cave of Treasures (4th century), explicitly connects slavery with dark-skinned people: "When Noah awoke. . .he cursed him and said: 'Cursed be Ham and may he be slave to his brothers'. . .and **he became a slave**, he and his lineage, namely the Egyptians, the Abyssinians, and the Indians. Indeed, Ham lost all sense of shame and **he became black** and was called shameless all the days of his life, forever." La caverne des trésors: version Géorgienne, ed. Ciala Kourcikidzé, trans. Jean-Pierre Mahé, Corpus scriptorium Christianorum orientalium 526-27, Scriptores Iberici 23-24 (Louvain, 1992-93), ch. 21, 38-39 (translation). **[3]** Ishodad of Merv (Syrian Christian bishop of Hedhatha, 9th century): When Noah cursed Canaan, "instantly, by the force of the curse. . .**his face and entire body became black** [ukmotha]. This is the black color which has persisted in his descendents." C. Van Den Eynde, Corpus scriptorium Christianorum orientalium 156, Scriptores Syri 75 (Louvain, 1955), p. 139.
21. Edith R. Sanders, "The Hamitic Hypothesis; Its Origin and Functions in Time Perspective," The Journal of African History, Vol. 10, No. 4 (1969), pp. 521-532
22. Benjamin Braude, "The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods," William and Mary Quarterly, vol. LIV (January 1997): 103–142

Professor Braude points out that the linkage between Noah's curse and black slavery first appears in Western literature with Portuguese voyages to W. Africa of discovery & commerce (including slavery.) He says, "**It appears, arguably for the first time in the exploration literature of Africa, in the mid-fifteenth-century *Chronicle of the Discovery and Conquest of Guinea* of Gomes Eannes de Azurara,**" which talks of 'ancient custom, which I believe to have been because of **the curse which after the Deluge, Noah laid upon his son Cain** [Portuguese original-"Cairn"], **cursing him in this way:- that his race should be subject to all the other races of the world. And from his race these Blacks are descended...'**" (pp. 127-8.) This 15th century writing confuses Canaan (Gen. 9) with Cain (in Gen. 4) both of whom were cursed. This is probably the first historical instance of "Noah's curse" being used to justify Black slavery.

23. Ken Ham, Dr. Carl Wieland, & Dr. Don Batten, "Where did the 'Races' come from?"
24. Bro. W. Lee never personally claimed to be infallible. On occasion, he admitted making mistakes-- "Although I have always intended to do the right thing, **I have nevertheless made many mistakes, even some big mistakes.** I certainly hate these mistakes, but I can testify that they have afforded God the opportunity to show forth His wisdom. Therefore, I can thank the Lord for all my mistakes." [W. Lee, *Life-study of Ephesians*, p. 273] "My point is this—**do not think that any leader could not make a mistake.** Only the Lord Jesus, the unique Leader, never made any mistake, It is absolutely impossible for Him to be mistaken. However, **all of us**, including Peter, **have made many mistakes.**" [W Lee, *One Accord for the Lord's Move, Elders' Training, Book 7*, p. 113] However, since Witness Lee's passing, LSM's "blended brothers" have attributed virtual infallibility to Witness Lee as the "Minister of the Age."
25. Acts 13:1, footnote 9. The wider context of the quote is: "This indicates that the church is composed of all races and classes of people regardless of their background, and that the spiritual gifts and functions given to the members of the Body of Christ are not based on their natural status."
26. Bro. Yu-Lan Dong received a letter from 21 "Blended Co-workers" (dated June 4, 2005—the same date a letter was sent to Bro. Titus Chu in the Great Lakes area) denouncing his work and publications. On the issue of Bro. Dong's interpretations differing from W. Lee's, the Co-workers in S. America responded: "Concerning Brother Dong's interpretations of the Scriptures, we want to say that he never took any position of someone who defines the truths as being definite and final....Everyone has the freedom to accept or not accept his interpretations. This does not belong to the scope of the common faith. Therefore no one can put down the ministry the Lord has entrusted him with, just because one does not agree with his interpretations." [Letter from "Your brothers and co-workers in S. America," Responding to the 21 "Blended Co-workers" Letter to Bro. Dong, June 2005]
27. Minoru Chen, *The Ministry*, vol. 9, no. 3, p. 48