

Not so Civil-ized

To the Seventh Generation

¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.

¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech.

¹⁹ And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

²⁰ Adah bore Jubal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

²¹ His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.

²² Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.

²⁴ If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him."

²⁶ To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

Genesis 4:16-26

Christianity and Culture

One of the vital questions Christians must deal with is that of our [relationship to culture](#). This question is always important, whether you are a Christian living in Rome in the first century under the persecution of Nero or a Christian living at the moment that Constantine makes Christianity the official religion of the Holy Roman Empire, a Christian living in a monarchy or a democracy, a Christian living during the rise of a great civilization or, like we find ourselves in today both morally and economically, the death of one.

Sadly, at an increasing rate since the 1960s, which saw at the pop-culture level the toppling of objective ethics, Christian values and religious practices, since that time, most Christians have stopped caring about the question at all. They don't care about how they are to live in culture as Christians. They don't reflect on it. They [just capitulate](#) to it, like floating down a river where ever it happens to take them. Even if there is a waterfall at the end, so long as they can have their fun, their gadgets, and their free health insurance, it's a beautiful ride.

An earlier generation was deeply impacted by two World Wars and a real Great Depression. They saw the first hand effects of secular philosophies like Communism obliterate over 100,000,000 people from the face of the earth. They

were sincerely worried about the rise of new technologies: weapons, media, transportation. They saw a culture implode morally during the Vietnam War all in the name of “change.” They fought against the culture with a defiance, sometimes against good things, sometimes not so good things. But theirs was a very different reaction to the culture than we ordinarily see today.

So how *should* we react to culture in our days when western civilization is crumbling, American culture is cracking, and the heads and bodies of our once great cultural power now dot a like ruins, such that it often feels like walking through a once great and mighty age of men that was but no longer exists?

Genesis 4 and Culture

I want to use the story of Cain after he leaves the Garden of Eden to help us think through just a little bit of *what it means to be Christians in culture*. Before I do that, perhaps I should define culture. By “culture” I mean very basically, *the sum total of all the ideas, institutions, lifestyles, and beliefs of a particular group*. Culture includes things like *speech, education, traditions, myths, science, art, philosophy, dress, government, law, rites, beliefs, inventions, technologies, and so on*.¹ Our text today speaks directly to this.

¹ For example, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Row, 1951), 29-39.

The City

It begins by showing us the chief organizing factor around which culture is built. This is the idea of a city (4:17). But there is background to the building of this city that I want to remind us of (from last time). It says, “Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Gen 4:16). You will remember that Cain was a farmer. He lived off the land, presumably like farmers of any age do, far enough away from civilization for his labor to produce its fruit. In this, both Cain and Abel (who was a shepherd, and the same idea would apply to him) represent human beings that are scattered, independent, agrarian. The only time mentioned where they come together is to worship God. Religion was the great gathering and cultural convention up to this point. Not anymore.

As we saw, because of his sin, Cain is cursed. God tells him that the ground will no longer produce for him. Cain leaves Eden and settles in the land of Nod—the land of Wandering. This is a great irony, to settle in the place of wandering. It is a contradiction. But it sets the stage for what is about to come.

The building of a city thus becomes Cain’s way of overcoming his curse. In the process, culture as we normally think of it begins. Let us think about cities for a moment in light of Cain being the first builder. Some might think

because of this that cities are evil. This is not true. Cities are not *inherently* evil. In the OT, God loves **Jerusalem** (**Ps 122:6**), he is concerned about **Nineveh** (**Jonah 4:11**). The NT depicts the eternal kingdom of Christ as the “**new Jerusalem**” coming down out of heaven (**Rev 21:2, 10**). Heaven will be a great city.

The problem is not the idea of a city, but how a **city magnifies human sin** and **suffering**. You pack thousands of people together in tight space. They cease knowing one another. Everyone becomes a face or a number rather than a human. You put governments and businesses into this impersonal setting. It is a recipe for disaster. Tony Jackson, who helped us start our South Denver church plant, refers to what happens in cities as the **Adamic Bomb**. We all know how cities are ground zero for every manner of evil (poverty, drugs, prostitution, murder, theft, power, corruption, etc.). It is like an explosion of sin occurs in the heart of cities that quickly mushrooms out, destroying everything in its path. So the problem of a city is not the city itself, but how it magnifies human depravity.

Names

The text is now going to explain the idea of culture *in this setting*. The story develops this through a very interesting **literary vehicle**. It is the vehicle of **genealogy**. Genealogies are

lists of names in a family tree. Most people find them overwhelmingly boring. I find them endlessly fascinating. Our genealogy teaches us about culture. It does so in two ways: through the **names** and through a few brief **notes** on some of those names.

It begins with another of those **puzzling questions** that are so often asked by modern people reading the early chapters of Genesis. “**Cain knew his wife**” (**Gen 4:17**). The question asked by so many is, “**Where did Cain get his wife?**” It is a natural question to ask, I suppose. The earliest answers we get are from Jews before the time of Christ who tell us, either through remembering an early tradition or through speculation, that Cain married his sister.

For example, the book of Jubilees (the Little Genesis) says, “**Cain took his sister, Awan, as a wife, and she bore for him Enoch at the end of the fourth jubilee**” (**Jub 4:9**). There is no hint that this was bad. This is probably still the most common explanation today. Of course, it raises the question of incest. How could it be moral for Cain to marry his sister? *We* don't even do that in our deeply sexually perverted culture. Well, as we will see later in Genesis, in the ancient world, it was a very common thing to marry one's sister. Both Abraham and Isaac call their wives their sisters. Among the reasons why we do not marry our brothers or sisters today is the pollution of the gene pool. Basically, we don't want our children to be

born with three eyes and four feet. It only later becomes unlawful to marry your sister after Moses, and this is undoubtedly one of the reasons for it.

At any rate, the focus is not on where Cain's wife came from, but on what happens to her. Like his father and mother, Cain “**knew**” his wife. Then, like Eve, she conceived and bore a **child**. The name of this child is **Enoch**. This is not the Enoch that is later translated to heaven without dying (see **Gen 5:24**) and after whom the ancient books of Enoch are named. This is Cain's son.

This Enoch is the third from Adam (**Adam-Cain-Enoch**).² The next verse adds four more names to the list: **Irad-Mehujael-Methushael-Lamech** (**vs. 18**). This is the genealogy of Cain. There are a total of **seven names**, which is obviously intentional. The structure of the passage is such that the first six constitute one section (**4:17-19**) and the last (**4:19-24**) constitutes a second section all its own. This parallels the creation week (6+1). As such, it serves as a **teaching device**. Seven is the perfect number. What is it trying to teach us? It is teaching us a kind of **anti-perfection**, the opposite of Genesis 1, but not in every way. It is more subtle than reading everything here as being pure evil.

² As opposed to the seventh from Adam; Jude 14.

If we return to **vs. 17**, we remember again how this is centered around a city. The text says that Cain went and built a city and named it after Enoch.³ According to the ancient Mesopotamians, the first city ever built was called **Eridu**. Curiously, Enoch's son is named **Irada**. Some have made the connection (if you add a "u" to Irada you get Iradu = Eridu) and have suggested that originally, the text pointed to Enoch building the city and naming it after his son.

This is probably not the case, but it illustrates something I want to point out. The genealogy teaches us not only through little caveats like the commentary on building a city, but in the very names of the men. Irada means "city of witness."⁴ Is there some kind of an oath going on here? At the

³ Josephus claims that he named is "Nod." Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.60.

⁴ For the sermon, I will pick out only one or two meanings of the names. But here is a more complete dictionary of the names in this genealogy. **1. Adam** (ad'-um) = Earthy or red earth; of the ground; taken out of the red earth; (root = to be red; ruddy). **2. Cain** (cain) = Possession; acquisition; fabrication. **3. Enoch** (e'-nok) = Initiated; initiating; teacher; dedicated; consecrated; experienced. **4. Irada** (i'-rad) = City of witness. Wild ass. A descent to a valley. **5. Mehujael** (me-hu'-ja-el) = Destroyed by God; struck by God; God is combating; blotted out by God; (root = to destroy; to wipe; to blot out; to abolish). **6. Methusael** (methu'-sa-el) = Man who is of God. Asking for death. They died enquiring; they died who are of God. **7. Lamech** (la'-mek) = Powerful; destroyer; One who overthrows; a strong young man; who is stuck. Reduced. **7wife-a. Adah** (a'-dah) = Ornament; to adorn; adornment; beauty; pleasure; (roots = [1] whom Jehovah adorns; [2] ornament from Jehovah). **7 wife-b. Zillah** (zil'-lah) = A shadow; shade; shadow of darkness or protection; (root = to be shady). He wasted. **7a son-of-wife-a. Jabal** (ja'-bal) = Leading; flowing; river; a river, moving or which glides away; (root = to flow; to bring; to lead; to carry). **7b son-of-wife-a. Jubal** (ju'-bal) = Joyful sound; music; jubilee; playing, ram's horn or a trumpet. He will be carried. **7c son-of-wife-b. Tubalcain** [Tubal-Cain's] (tu'-bal-cain) = Flowing forth of Cain; i.e., increase of the race of Cain; production; forged work. You will be brought of Cain. **7 daughter-of-wife-b.**

very least, this city is a monument to men rather than God, just like we do today: Washington, Lincoln, Madison, Jacksonville, etc.

Other names have significance to the interpretation of the story too. **Enoch** means “initiated” or a “teacher.” Throughout the ages, the name has been used to refer to knowledge gained and transmitted through contact with the other-world. **Mehuajael** means “destroyed by God.” **Methusael** means “asking for death.” **Lamech** means “powerful” or “destroyer.” The names are teaching us something about what went on when the city was built without foundations and without God (cf. **Heb 11:10**). What they teach is that in the city, things degenerate, quickly.

“**Degenerate**” is a great word for this. It means, “Having lost the physical, mental, or moral qualities considered normal and desirable; showing evidence of decline.” All civilizations that rise eventually fall. As the saying goes, **the higher they rise, the harder they fall**. America and the West are presently in a state of stupor and stammer, like a drunken giant wobbling about, trying to catch its balance to no avail. When finally they topple, they will crash with a deafening sound and a resounding, reverberating thud such that it will shake

Naamah (na'-a-mah) = Pleasant; sweetness. From Stelman Smith and Judson Cornwall, *The Exhaustive Dictionary of Bible Names* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos, 1998),

the very foundations of the earth itself. **Should Christians be frightened of this?**

America is the last of the great world-power super-cultures of Western civilization, which has been so powerful and influential in the world since the times of the Greeks. When she falls, it is difficult to see how any shall rise in her place, for the world is very different than it was when Greece, Rome, Spain, France, Britain, or even America each rose in succession to power. But what made these cultures so great? And what causes them to fall so hard?

The beginnings of the great empires of the world are usually found in their **laws and virtues**—be it Hamurabbi and Babylon, or the philosophers of the Greeks, or the Republic of the Romans, or the Magna Carte of the British, or the Constitution of the United States. Conversely, when they fall, it is because they have abandoned their founding for madness and folly. In their great wealth and power, they become complacent and arrogant, lazy, fat and immoral.

Notes

Here is where I want to introduce **the last of the names** and the notes that are associated with him. The Seventh from Adam on Cain's side is a man named Lamech. He is the destroyer. His life is a kind of anti-sabbath and anti-rest. He is the personification of lawlessness in a society, where men find no peace or rest.

Though he is not named as such in the Bible, he is kind of the **anti-king** to Yahweh. In fact, this point deserves a brief diversion. In Mesopotamian accounts of the world before the Flood, there were **seven Sumerian sages**, demigods called **Apkallu**. These Apkallu **establish culture** and give civilization to mankind. They served as priests and advisors to the earliest kings of Sumer. There is scholarly debate on the following fact, but these kings were said to be eight in number and to have ruled over five cities for a total reign of 241,200 years.⁵

These Apkallu were sent by the gods to culture us. This idea finds a curious parallel in **1 Enoch**, which tells us that **Azazel** (the goat-demon named in Lev 16), who was one of the Watchers (cf. **Dan 4:13, 23**) that fell from heaven, came down to earth, saw our women, and took them as wives. It then says that he along with other fallen Watchers taught us how to make **weapons**: swords, knives, shields, breastplates from the metals of the earth and the art of working them. They taught women to make **bracelets**, ornaments from the shiny silvery metal antimony, along with face-makeup from

⁵ See the Sumerian King List: <http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/section2/tr211.htm>. See John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 42; also Raul Erlando Lopez, "The Antediluvian Patriarchs and the Sumerian King List," *CEN Tech.* 12:3 (1998): 347-57. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/tj/v12/n3/sumerian>

costly stones and coloring dyes (1 Enoch 8:1).⁶ All of these things have to do with the uses of metal.⁷

One more fact is now worth pointing out. The word for a “city” in Hebrew is ‘ir (). Curiously, the word for a Watcher is also ‘ir (). This is no coincidence, for in the ancient world, “The building of a city was a divine enterprise.”⁸ Each city had a patron god attached to it.⁹ (In naming the city for his son, perhaps Cain is even trying to deify his son). This fits the Biblical idea of princes over territories such as Greece or Persia or Israel, only on a smaller scale (Dan 10:20; 12:1). As Jeremiah says, “But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.” They had turned to the gods, and had forsaken the God of Jerusalem. Jerusalem was

⁶ They are also said to have taught us magic, the use of herbs, astrology, astronomy (1 En 8:2-4), how to make war, how to cook, how to write with ink and paper, how to abort babies, and how to deal with demons (69:4-12).

⁷ See George W. E. Nickelsburg, *1 Enoch: a Commentary on the Book of 1 Enoch*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2001), 194.

⁸ John H Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Old Testament): Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 40. He cites P. D. Miller, “Eridu, Dunnu, and Babel: A Study in Comparative Mythology,” *HAR* 9 (1985): 239–40.

⁹ For this reason, some have suggested that “city” actually be translated as “watcher” in at least two places in the OT text: Micah 5:14 (“I will root out your Asherah images from among you and destroy your cities.”) and Jer 2:28 (“But where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah.”). See J. J. Collins, “Watcher,” *DDD*, 894.

Yahweh's city. Think about all of these things as now circling over our passage in the short story of Lamech and consider how the Bible interprets things. *Its focus is not on the gods* at this moment (it is in many places later in the Bible), but on the sin of *mankind*.

The first thing we learn about Lamech is that he “*took two wives*” (*Gen 4:19*). It is not clear whether this “taking” is consensual or not, for the word can be used both in a positive way (like consent) or negatively (like a rape or the divine right of a king to take any virgin he wants). Whichever way it was, the focus is on the number: *two*. Lamech is the first *polygamist*. This is a serious deviation from the pre-fallen norm pictured in the Garden of Eden where there is one husband and one wife.

Some have tried to argue that polygamy isn't really all that bad a thing, and believe me when I say that this is the next sexual-family pillar that will fall in Western civilization. They are already making strong headway into legalizing polygamy in our own land. People will point to how Abraham was a kind of polygamist, as was Jacob, as was David and Solomon, so it must be fine. But this is to take something that is *descriptive* and make it *prescriptive* or normative. Just because some biblical heroes did a thing doesn't make it right (David was also an adulterer and murderer). In any of these stories, does the polygamy ever

result in something positive? Of course not. It results in hardship, family strife and warfare. This is why God would command the king not to take many wives (**Deut 17:17**). So Lamech's polygamy is not here as good thing.

At this point, we must be careful how we proceed. We must be careful not to demonize everything in the Lamech story. We must find the essence of the problem and think critically. Moses names the two wives (**Gen 4:19**). The name of the first is Adah. **Adah** means “**adornment**.” Think about what I just said about Azazel teaching women to put makeup on their faces and to wear bracelets and other **ornaments**. The other wife is **Zillah**. Her name is almost the opposite. It means “**a shadow**” or a “**shade**” (a demon), a shadow of darkness or **protection**. Remember how Cain had a mark that would “protect” him? Well now, so does Lamech. I don't want to make too much of this, but if the names are to teach us, perhaps we have Lamech being adorned and protected by dark things.

But we also have two of the elements of culture: beautification and, possibly, religion. Next it says that Adah had a son. His name is **Jabal**. The root of this word is to bring or to lead or to carry. The idea of a flowing river is associated with it. Jabal is said to be the father of all who dwell in tents and have livestock (**Gen 4:20**). In other words, he is the first **domesticator of animals**. Again, more culture.

Adah has another son. His name is **Jubal**. Jubal means a joyful sound; music; ram's horn or trumpet. Jubal is called the “**father of all who play the lyre and pipe**” (**Gen 4:21**). Again, more culture.

Finally, Zillah has a son. He is named **Tubal-cain**. The idea of naming after Cain is to relate him back to his ancestor as a badge of honor. Tubal means to produce or forge. And so, he is the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. Again, this has the parallel in Enoch with all the things made out of metal taught by Azazel. Again, it refers to culture.¹⁰ To round it all off, we also get the name of the sister of Tubal-cain. Her name is **Naamah**. This means “**pleasant, sweetness.**” Surely, this is what the inventors of culture thought they were bringing.

These names and the brief statements about some of them is where we must be careful. Before moving on to the last bit of Lamech's story, we have to deal with **a question about culture**. Some Christians have taken a very negative stance towards some aspects, particularly modern aspects (to them) of culture. Some have pointed to this very story to say, “**See. Culture is evil. Music, domestication, make-up, technology,**

¹⁰ Someone sent me an interesting article this week on Tubal-cain and his relation to the Iron Age (which is supposedly much later than him. It discusses the discovery of iron beads excavated in Egypt that date to 3,200 BC). See the first blog entry by Bryant G. Wood PhD at: <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/09/12/2013-Roundup-of-Significant-New-Discoveries.aspx#Article>

it is all of the devil, for this is the line of Cain that is creating such things.” Of course, it usually isn’t as blunt as this. It is more like this: *Certain types* of music are evil. The devil has his rock and roll, that 4|4 beat. I can remember people saying how the Beatles were evil, but Elvis was great. Cards are of the devil, but Old Maid is not. Many have said that movies, electricity, and the automobile are each of the devil. Yet, they still tells stories, use fire, and drive a horse and carriage. This is more like picking and choosing what we want, with little rhyme or reason other than personal prejudice.

Think about what such thinking does? How do people view the [Amish](#), who take a stance not unlike this towards the culture. They view this stance as being [the essence of their religion](#), and perhaps it is. Curiously though, they end up creating their own culture (it is unavoidable), even while they use older inventions that at one time someone probably also thought was an invention of the devil. Someone had to invent the wheel, and it wasn’t Henry Ford. I have talked with numerous people who grew up under a fundamentalism that was like this to a degree. Many of those people believed the legalism was the good news, and many of those people rebelled against Christianity, because to them, what it means to be a Christian is that you don’t dance, don’t listen to rock music, and so on. Go watch the movie *Footloose* and you’ll get a good idea of it all, and tell Netflix your pastor sent you.

The solution is not found in making that which is common evil. The common is not evil. It is neither good nor evil. It belongs to a world that God created good, but which has been subjected to evil, and therefore, it can be used for evil or for good. Just as God loves cities and will one day renew them, so also **God loves music**—*Jubil-ee*. There are at least two books in the Bible that are entirely musical (Psalms and Habakkuk). How is the music being used? God also commanded us to subdue the earth, and this is necessarily a culture-creating activity. While make-up can be used for evil purposes (such as Jezebel for her gods; **2 Kgs 9:30**), so also it likens being godly as the ultimate kind of adornment (**Prov 3:22**; **1 Pet 3:5**), which presupposes that it is not necessarily evil to wear beautifying apparel (as the old saying goes, “**If the barn needs painting, paint it**”). In the same way, technology can be used for good or for evil. This includes even weapons (self-protection, hunting for food, etc).

But be careful again. Some have this tendency to say that if it is used for religion, then that is the only good use of a thing. Thus, the only good use of a movie is to make a Christian movie. The only good use of a song is to write a praise and worship song. And so the only radio on their dial is KLUV. This is dangerous theology, because **it roots common things in the fall and redemption**, rather than in **creation** and the mandate God gave to humanity. I believe what Genesis 4

is teaching us here is that, in spite of the line of Cain, human beings are still capable of carrying out the creation mandate.¹¹

I think what would have been striking to a Jew about reading this is how it is the line of Cain that is nevertheless able to go about continuing to advance culture. Just the opposite of a fundamentalism that views culture as evil, it is also possible to think that only godly people are able to advance in and participate in civilization, in positive, meaningful ways. Also striking is how there are no supernatural beings needed here. Men are perfectly capable of figuring out how to become cultural beings all on their own.¹²

In thinking about this, what we need, I believe, is not a pure capitulation to culture, just accepting and doing whatever the culture does, nor pure demonization of culture (which is always selective). What we need **are Christians who are willing to think deeply** about the many aspects of culture, discovering what is good about a thing, and what is bad about a thing, how a thing can be used for good and how it can be used for bad, and also how a thing uses us. We need

¹¹ See David VanDrunen, *Living in God's Two Kingdoms* (Crossway: 2010), 78, 188.

¹² This is not to say that supernatural beings did or did not have any influence upon early human civilization, nor that they still may. But we must not commit the logical fallacy of saying that the absence of a thing is proof of the absence. If other passages talk about this, then that would be evidence. If they were, then the lack of supernatural beings here would be for the purpose of highlighting humanity for the time being.

Christians who will sit together and talk about movies Christianly: What was true about that movie? What was transcendentally good? What was wrong with it? What worldview is it promoting. What was its ultimate message? How does this comport with our faith?¹³

We need Christians who will teach young people, including their children, how to think about culture. Take schooling as an example of culture. Some love to demonize home-schooling. Others love to demonize public schooling. And then there are private schools. There are all kinds of ways to educate, because education belongs to creation. There are basic things that everyone needs to know, whether they are Christians or non-Christians. Parents have to pick something. Whatever their choice, they must think Christianly about it, *and teach their children* to think Christianly about it too.

It is not enough to just throw your children to the state and let them have them. Nor is it enough to separate your children from the world completely, as if that were even possible. What is good about the schooling we have chosen, and what things does it lack? What ethics are being taught at a particular school. If you public school, how are you helping

¹³ This is not to say that all movies are worth watching or should be watched. Clearly, there are objective lines that are crossed and each person will have their own conscience at different places, and we must each be sensitive to one another, while moving towards maturity in Christ.

your kids think about what they are learning? If you private Christian school, what things does this school teach that are in line with your own theology and not in line with it? What values are you not imparting in your choice of homeschooling materials?

Basically, what I'm saying is that we have got to stop being reactionary or liberal and start to be thinkers and to be proactive. If Christianity is to survive in the west into the next century, we are going to have to think better about this, or Christianity will simply cease to exist in our land, as it basically already does.

What Went Wrong?

There is an upholding of our common humanity in the story of Cain's children. All human beings bear the image of God, and this does not get erased just because of sin. But this is the Bible, and this is the line of Cain, and the story of Lamech is not yet concluded.

Something goes wrong. What is it? Sin get a hold of Lamech, and it multiplies. This is what godlessness does. Even if it creates good things, because they do not do it to glorify God and because they are also sinful, they end up worshiping those things and themselves. Look at what Lamech does.

He composes a song. Music. He sings it to his wives. What is the content of that song? What is its purpose? “**Adah**

and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold" (Gen 4:23-24). Its purpose is to boast in sin. Its purpose is to show how sin comes to completeness. It is one thing to sing a song that exposes sin in a shocking way. It is another to sing a song that revels in it.

The number **seven** is in the song: sevenfold and seventy-sevenfold. Also, there are 21 words in this song. $3 \times 7 = 21$. This is a triple reinforcement of the perfection of sin. What happens is that Lamech compares himself to Cain. Like Cain, he killed a man. Lamech tries to justify his murder by saying that he wounded me. It is an ego trip. The song is all about Lamech. It is a boast.

Wenham writes, "If Adah and Zillah watched with pride as their sons developed husbandry, music, and metalworking, they listened with horror to their husband's violent blood lust. Lamech's seventy-sevenfold vengeance stands in contrast with the law of talion which limits retaliation to exact equivalence (Exod 21:25 "bruise for bruise," "hit for hit" echoes the terminology of Gen 4:23 exactly)." ¹⁴

Jesus tells us that rather than retaliate and boast in it, we are to let them strike us (Matt 5:39), and if they seek

¹⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 114.

repentance, we are to forgive **seventy times seven** (**Matt 18:22**). God's ethic is the exact opposite of Lamech's. One scholar sums it up, "The text has moved from unrepentant Cain to defiant Lamech. Violence is glorified, and the mark of Cain no longer stands as a stigma of exile but as a badge of honor that brings protection equivalent to invulnerability. The human situation is degenerating."¹⁵ The work of sin that started in Cain has found completion in Lamech. It has sprung to life and given birth to death. And this colors all that men do in the cities that they build.

Is There Hope?

So is there any hope? The story does not end with Lamech, though the line of Cain finishes with him. Instead, it returns to **Adam**. Adam again knows his wife, and she again bears a son, and they call his name **Seth**. Seth's name is prophetic. It means "appointed" or "compensation" or "substitute." For God has appointed another "seed" instead of Abel, for Cain killed him. Basically, Seth becomes the father through which Noah, Abram, Judah, David, and Christ will be born. Seth is God's answer to Lamech. Seth is God's grace to Adam and Eve.

But what of Seth himself? The last verse creates a difficulty. Seth gives birth to **Enosh**. Enosh means "man in his

¹⁵ John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 278.

frailty” or “feeble” or “mortal.” In naming his son this, Seth shows true wisdom. He recognizes that like his older brother, life is a vapor. Men die. Even those in the appointed line die. Chapter 5 will explore this theme in great detail through the line of Seth. They leave the world of the living and are not immortalized forever, but are forgotten.

There is one last comment that is potentially confusing. “At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26). This is a strange thing to say, given that Cain and Abel both certainly knew the name of the LORD and given that they both seem to have called upon him.

What makes this stranger is that all of the Jewish Targums read the verb *chalal* (“began”) as something like “pollute” (a possible meaning). Pseudo-Jonathan paraphrases the idea, “And to Seth also was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. That was the generation in whose days they began to err, and to make themselves idols, and surnamed their idols by the name of the Word (*memra*) of the Lord.” The Onkelos Targum is similar, “To Seth also was born a son, and he called his name Enosh. Then in his days the sons of men desisted (or forbore) from praying in the name of the Lord.”

The implications of this are fascinating, though to my knowledge, no English Bible translation goes with this idea. But they are of such opposite ends of the spectrum, that I thought I would close with a thought that I get from each.

First, if men are polluting the name of Yahweh and creating idols, note that it is in the context of the “godly” line of Seth. Add this to the idea of man as a mortal and you do not get the feeling that God chooses this line *because* they are godly. Rather, as election seems to be throughout the Bible every place else, election is God’s choice, not man’s. Seth is appointed by God’s grace, and not because there is something about him that is somehow above the sins of Cain or Lamech.

On the other hand, if this refers to the true worship of the true God, it demonstrates that not everyone went the way of Cain. Some followed Yahweh. Nevertheless, their choice to worship was because he first “appointed” a man of his own. The frailty of this man and his sons proves that they were right to worship the LORD, for he alone is immortal and full of life and goodness. Yet, as the seed, Seth pointed the need for a greater Seed to come, one that would crush the serpent’s head and death the final blow to sin, by overcoming it through exposing himself to our human flesh, becoming mortal, and dying for our sin.

This is God’s grace even at this early stage in our cultural development. Yes, we live in human cultures. These cultures are all fallen, even the things Christians invent. They can be used for good or for evil. But ultimately, we are people who come from another place, as we are born by the Spirit. Our kingdom is not of this world. And so while we live here, we

are not to put our hope here. We are not to fret if America falls by God's decree, because all who put their hope and trust in Christ alone have a kingdom that is imperishable, with a culture that is fully redeemed and no longer subject to sin. Put your faith in Christ, and let these words be an encouragement to you in the days gathering storms and darkness ahead.