

Genesis 4.9-26: Descendants of Cain

The Discipline of Cain [vv.9-16]

v.9: God's question is somewhat familiar (cf. 3.9). Again, it is not that He does not know where Abel is and what Cain has done, but His questioning is designed to bring Cain to confession and repentance. "I know not" was a blatant lie, characteristic of his spiritual father the Devil (John 8.44). That he sought to cover his sinful actions by falsehood suggests Cain knew he had done wrong. "Am I my brother's keeper" is the first *human* question of the Bible. As firstborn, Cain did have responsibility to 'watch over' and 'care for' his brother, the word also implying a degree of authority. Indeed, Jehovah's relationship to Israel is described in Psalm 121 as the "keeper" of Israel. *"The definitive reply to Cain's question is found in the later Noahic covenant when the Lord formally sanctions retributive justice against murderers"*.

v.10: In an exclamatory statement of horror, Jehovah says "What have you done!" "The voice" could be translated as "Listen!" The "blood" of righteous Abel (cf. Matthew 23.35; Luke 11.51) was crying out in appeal for justice (vindication) from the ground (cf. Revelation 6.10). Whilst Cain could silence the prophesying voice of his brother, he could not still voice of his blood! **v.11:** For the first time, a curse is passed upon a person rather than the *animal kingdom* (3.14) or the *ground* (3.17). The suitability of the judgment is again apparent – because Cain had polluted the ground with innocent blood, so he would be "cursed from the earth". There is a dual meaning in this statement, as indicated by the explanation of **v.12**. First, he would be punished "from" or 'through the agency' of the ground – so that when he tried to cultivate the earth it would no longer yield its best. He would have to survive by hunting and gathering. Second, he was also banished "from the ground" in the sense of becoming a "fugitive" (displaced person) and "vagabond" (wanderer). He would have an unsettled life, moving aimlessly without a home. LM Grant notes, *"This is a description of every unbeliever. As a fugitive he is virtually running away from God, never facing up to his guilt and his need of a Saviour. As a vagabond, he is a wanderer, going in every direction to seek rest or satisfaction but never finding it."* Cain was not put to death because the death penalty would not be effected until after the flood in the dispensation of human government (9.6). In addition, Cain would become a walking sermon of the grace of God and tragic consequences of sin (Wiersbe). Note. Cain sinned against his brother in a serious way with the result of barrenness. Sadly, there are many breaches of brotherhood in assemblies today. Is it any wonder the sowing of the seed does not yield the fruit it could?

v.13: "My punishment ('*avon*) is greater than I can bear". '*avon* is a general word for *sin* (iniquity) and its *penalty*. It does not indicate a sense of guilt or repentance on Cain's part, rather, he is complaining of the severity of his punishment. This is a defiant complaint against God in self-pity and resentment. **v.14:** He would be "driven" (cf. 3.24) away from the land, and therefore the immediate presence and providential care of God as represented in the cherubim at Eden's gate. In terms of analogy of the tabernacle, whilst Adam and Eve had been banished from the *Holy of Holies* (garden of Eden), Cain is now being driven out of the *camp* entirely. As a nomad, he was also concerned that anyone finding him would kill him. How ironic! He who killed (*hāraḡ*) his own brother now frets lest someone kill (*hāraḡ*) him! **v.15:** Under the Law, if a family member was killed accidentally, the kinsman redeemer could avenge their blood by slaying the murderer (Numbers 35.19). In marvellous grace, and in response to Cain's fears, God is pleased to regard him as a manslayer rather than a murderer. He provides a *legal declaration* (indicated in the Hebrew word translated "therefore") and *visual sign* to act as a city of refuge for Cain. Anyone who killed him would be punished "sevenfold", a hyperbole meaning a perfect measure of full, divine retribution (severe punishment). Cain was also "marked" with some outward, visual reminder of his special protected status (cf. Ezekiel 9.4). The same word is used of the rainbow as a "token" of God's covenant with Noah (9.12-13, 17) and the blood of the Passover lambs on the houses of Egypt (Exodus 12.13). We do not know what the mark was, but the ancient rabbis had some interesting views. They believed the mark was either *one* or all *four* letters of the Name of God (YHWH), or leprosy so others would be afraid to touch him, or even a horn on his head to fight off attackers! All is a striking picture of God's dealings with the nation of Israel. Being credited with the manslaughter rather than murder of Christ, the nation fled as wanderers amongst the nations, finding no resting place for their feet. "Still, God does not give permission to Gentiles to exterminate them, though this has been tried time and again. God's mark is upon Israel, and those nations that make her suffer will themselves suffer God's retribution" (LM Grant). **v.16:** So, Cain "went out from the presence of the LORD" (cf. v.14) and "dwelt" in the "land of Nod", meaning 'flight' or 'wandering', probably taking its name from Cain's status. Thus, the wanderer ends up in the land of wandering. Nod's location "eastward of Eden" implies he is further removed from the garden than Adam and Eve. In the tabernacle, God's presence was in the west, and heathen worship was often towards the east and the rising of the sun. The compass direction of east often speaks of evil and departure (13.11; 25.6).

The Descendants of Cain [vv.17-24] and Seth [vv.25-26]

This final section of the chapter breaks clearly into three smaller sections. **1. Sons of Cain** (vv.17-22). **2. Song of Lamech** (vv.23-24). **3. Substitute of Abel** (vv.25-26). These verses are not chronological. Rather, they contrast the development of *two* families on earth – the *secular* (or material) and the *sacred* (or spiritual). The family of Seth were characterised by the *worship* of God (cf. v.26), but the family of Cain by *rebellion* against God. He and his descendants greatly prospered, using their intellect to develop civilisation by building cities, producing music, and advancing agriculture and metallurgy. *“Such activity may have been their way to cope with life under the curse; it was their only recourse in a bitter life. Being separated from God, Cain’s line enhanced their life with these refinements”* (AP Ross). The descendants of Seth no doubt used culture and its advancements, but did so to the glory of God.

v.17: Cain had sexual relations with his wife resulting in the birth of “Enoch”. Where did Cain get his wife? Adam and Eve had many children including daughters, so it is likely he married his sister (cf. 5.4). At this stage in human history, incest was not prohibited so the human race could grow. Once population had increased, this kind of marriage was forbidden (cf. Leviticus 18.1). In addition, in this early pristine era of humanity, there were no mutant genes to cause the kind of problems that a decaying humanity experiences through such relations today. **Answers in Genesis** provide a fuller explanation: *“Adam and Eve were created perfect. It wasn’t until after the Fall that suffering and death affected mankind and every other living thing. One aspect of this suffering would have been mutations in the DNA that result in disease. Since Adam and Eve were created genetically perfect, their children would have had few mutations. Mutations in subsequent generations would have continued to increase and accumulate. Eventually, it became too dangerous to marry a close relation because of the increased likelihood of inherited disease.”*

The name “Enoch” can mean ‘consecration’ or ‘dedication’. It seems that at the time of his birth Cain was in the process of “building a city” (NET) which he named in commemoration of his son. In contrast, the righteous rarely named places after themselves or their posterity (cf. 22.14; 28.19; 32.2). Their priority was not self-glorification, but the glory of God. In direct rebellion against God, Cain seemingly refused to be a vagabond and wanderer, building a permanent residence on earth. Man away from God will always set his sights on building something great in this world (cp. Heb. 11.9-10). This city was the beginning of the world system so often referred to in the NT (cf. 1 John 2.15). The Greek word translated ‘world’ is *kosmos* which means an ‘ordered arrangement’. It can refer to the world *creatorially* (John 1.10) or *humanly* (John 3.16), but often refers to the world *morally*; a system originated by Cain and governed by Satan (1 John 5.19). It is designed to make man *content* and *comfortable* without God. Though heaven is pictured as a garden city, the cities of earth are far removed from its principles and atmosphere. The cities of Genesis were *social* (Enoch), *political* (Nineveh, 10.11-12), *immoral* (Sodom, 13.13) and *religious* (Babylon in Shinar, 11.4). So, Enoch was ‘dedicated’ to the world, his name being stamped indelibly on this scene. What a contrast to the “Enoch” of Seth’s line (cf. 5.24). He was dedicated to God, and “was not; for God took him”. Heaven was his abiding portion!

v.18: The line of descent from Adam through Cain to Lamech is *seven* generations. It seems that ever-increasing corruption finds its climax in him. The seventh from Adam through Seth was a marked contrast – a man who “walked with God”. Though the line of Seth (traced in Genesis 5) is a little longer, there are similarities in names, and they end focused on *three* sons.

To Enoch was born “Irada” (‘city man’). It seems he was a townsman, suggesting business was already operating within the confines of a settlement. To Irada was born “Mehujael” (to ‘wipe’ or ‘blot out’ by God) and his son “Methusael” (‘death to him of God’). Their names could be a recognition that they were under the judgment of God.

v.19: The seventh from Adam was “Lamech” (‘powerful warrior’ or ‘strong youth’). He is the ultimate illustration of a morally declining society. Though the taking of *two* or more wives is not rebuked here, nor expressly forbidden by Scripture, it was a movement away from God’s original design for marriage (cf. Matthew 19.4-6). Whenever polygamy is recorded in Scripture it brings untold conflict, strife, and trouble to families. The practice originated with those who had become estranged from God. The phrase “took unto him” suggests something formal (legal) and recognised. The name “Adah” means ‘ornament’ or ‘jewel’, and the name “Zillah” to ‘twinkle’ or ‘tingle’ (like the equivalent English name ‘Melody’). There was clearly a physical attraction to the way Adah looked, and the way Zillah sounded. Character traits such as *godliness* and *holiness* were clearly of no interest to Lamech! It is also possible Lamech had self-aggrandisement and

The Line of Cain	The Line of Seth
Adam	Adam
Cain	Seth
Enoch	Enosh
Irada	Kenan
Mehujael	Mahalaleel
Methusael	Jared
Lamech	Enoch
Jabal	Methuselah
Jubal	Lamech
Tubal-Cain	Noah
(Naamah)	Shem
	Ham
	Japheth

material gain in view. More wives meant more children to work in the family business. This in turn would provide increased wealth and power. **v.20:** The sons of Lamech illustrate the brilliance of humanity as this era brought the onset of trade, commerce, the arts, science, and industrial engineering. The sons are all connected to the same Hebrew stem (*yabal*) which means 'to produce'. They were all highly productive individuals:

- **Jabal.** To 'lead in procession' or 'flow away' as a river. His descendants kept "cattle" (livestock) – a much broader term than "flocks" used in relation to Abel (4.2). It includes all types of livestock even camels and donkeys, rather than merely sheep and goats. He was a professional cattle-breeder and herder who likely moved from one place to another in search of fresh pasture, hence a "dweller in tents". He was the originator of a nomadic lifestyle.
- **Jubal** (v.21). To 'make a joyful sound' or 'play the trumpet' (jubilee). The "harp" refers to some kind of *stringed* instrument and the "organ" to a tubular *wind* instrument. Both words are used in Psalm 150, which catalogues many musical instruments and concludes, "Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD".
- **Tubal-cain** (v.22). To 'flow forth of Cain' or 'increase of Cain'. His name was possibly to honour their evil ancestor. He was an "instructor" (to 'forge' or 'sharpen') of "every artificer" (to 'engrave as a craftsman'). NET translates as "who heated metal and shaped all kinds of tools made of bronze and iron".
- **Naamah.** One who is 'pleasant' or 'graceful'. The names of daughters and sisters are not often mentioned.

v.23: The song of Lamech suggests the arts of poetry and music were well advanced. The song comprises *three* couplets, based, not on rhythm or rhyme, but parallelism. A poetic and literal translation would be:

*"Adah and Zillah // wives of Lamech
listen to me // hear my words
a man for wounding // a young man for injuring me
seven times // seventy-seven times"*

Clearly developments in culture, the arts and science could not cure society of its corruption and violence as exemplified in Lamech (cf. 6.11). MacArthur remarks, "*No gorilla ever wrote a poem. This is man in God's image. Even fallen, he is remarkable. He lives over 900 years, and he develops all these things to a sophisticated level. But he's wicked, proud, arrogant, insensitive, vengeful, and murderous. He is the genius, civilized savage.*"

"I have slain a man to my wounding" is in the *perfect* form and may indicate an act *already committed*, but could also be *conditional*, and therefore a *warning of confident assurance*. Perhaps, with newly acquired weapons in his hand (from Tubal-cain), he thinks of himself as invincible. If provoked or threatened, he would not hesitate to retaliate by killing even a child. Indeed, the Hebrew verbs can be translated in the future tense, "I *will* slay anyone who wounds me". **v.24:** And such was his self-confidence and pride, he did not even feel the need of divine protection (as Cain). He was confident of avenging himself **77** times, not merely "sevenfold". Far from taking vengeance, the Lord Jesus taught forgiveness to the extent of **490** times (Matthew 18.22)! If God promised a sevenfold vengeance on anyone killing Cain, Lamech himself guaranteed a seventy-sevenfold retribution on anyone who even hurt him! He does not need God!

v.25: The close of the chapter flashes back in time to the birth of Seth. There is yet hope for a deliverer. "Seth" means 'appointed one' or 'new beginning' because God had given Eve another "seed" (not "man", cf. 3.15; 4.1) as a substitute in the place of Abel. With Seth, Adam's line begins afresh as if God is making a new beginning. When the "generations of Adam" are recounted (cf. 5.1-3), there is no record of the fall – it is almost as if sin never entered the world. Seth is therefore a picture of Christ in resurrection, as Abel is a type of the Good Shepherd that died. Abel, the first, died; Seth, the second, lives. **v.26:** To Seth was born "Enos" meaning 'weakness', i.e. frail, mortal man (cf. Psalm 103.15). It is a consciousness of such inherent weakness that directs him to "call upon the name of the LORD". This is delightful expression characterising the spirituality of the line of Seth. The Hebrew phrase suggests the beginning of regular public worship in the form of prayer *and* proclamation (cf. Exodus 34.6). "Name" refers to the *character* and *attributes* of the Person concerned, so there was public proclamation of the nature of **Jehovah** – a God with whom individuals can have a personal relationship. As the verb "began" is *passive*, it may indicate that the line of Seth comprised individuals called by the name of Jehovah. There is a godly line known by Jehovah's name. In summary, the statement is an expression of *weakness*, declaring their dependence on the LORD; of *worship*, they appreciated what the LORD had done for them; and of *witness*, they were bearing testimony to others.