

LAMECH AND SETH (1)

A Meditation on Genesis 4:17-26

According to Ken Ham, who lectures on Genesis and is featured on radio shows answering questions on Genesis, the most frequently asked question concerning Genesis is, “Where did Cain get his wife?” Some have suggested that God created other people in other parts of the world. But then we would have to ask, “Did they fall into sin?” “Were they created in God’s image?” as well as a host of other questions. But Scripture declares that everyone originated from Adam and Eve. “And he made from *one man* every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth...” (Acts 17:26). “The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of *all living*” (Gen. 3:20).

Everyone is a descendant of Adam and Eve. This means that Cain married his sister or another near relative. Keep in mind that at this time God had not yet outlawed incestuous marriages for an obvious reason, namely these were the only options available. Even about two thousand years later, Abraham married his half-sister, Sarah—and it was lawful. We should also realize that the genetic repercussions for such close relationships were not put into effect at this time.

Genesis 4:17 doesn’t tell us where Cain’s wife came from, because that isn’t the point of the passage. Its purpose is rather to show the development of the two different lines—the ungodly line and the godly line; the serpent’s offspring and the woman’s offspring.

In our last chapter, we saw that righteous Abel was martyred by his brother (I call him a martyr, since he was killed for his faith). Then according to 4:16: “Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.” The footnote in my Bible says that Nod means wandering. I point this out, because all throughout the Bible the names of people and places are significant and insightful, so we must train ourselves to pay attention to them. For example, Abram means “exalted father” or “father of many,” while Abraham means “father of a multitude.” God changed his name to illustrate the blessing that was going to come through him. It’s an interesting paradox that Cain “settled” in the land of *wandering*. I believe this is a reference to Cain’s inner turmoil; he settles down on the outside, but his soul will never experience rest or peace. How could it without God? As St. Augustine said, “Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in Thee” (also consider Jesus’ words in Matt. 11:28-30).

In ancient days a city was a city, as opposed to the country or a town, not because its population was a certain size, but because it had a protective wall around it. Now let’s ask, “Why did Cain build a protective wall?” Didn’t God promise to protect Cain? Obviously Cain didn’t believe God. The wicked never do, thus they feel threatened, even when nobody is against them. “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are bold as a lion” (Pro. 28:1).

In addition to being places with protection, cities are notorious for their great iniquity. There are exceptions of course. The New Jerusalem is a city, and it is righteous. Nevertheless, the general rule still stands.

In Genesis 4:17 we see that Cain builds a city and names it after his son, Enoch. It’s too bad he couldn’t have named the city something like Jerusalem, with the etymology *shalom* in its name. The godly often name cities or places with reference to God. Maybe I’m straining a gnat, but Cain’s city has no orientation toward God, because it has nothing to do with God, and the culture that develops in this city will not be glorifying to God, it will be corrupt. Years ago, Henry Van Til said culture is religion externalized. This doesn’t mean that “religion is an internal, private affair which occasionally becomes externalized when it interfaces with culture... Van Til was describing an inevitable process” (David Bruce Hegeman, *Plowing in Hope*, p. 15-16). A person’s religion will always manifest itself in what they do, whether it’s education, music, art, agriculture, etc.

From Adam to Lamech is seven generations. “And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah” (Gen. 4:19). Bigamy results from generations of sin. Cain’s line is headed in the wrong direction. H.C. Leupold writes, “Having cast off the only reliable account of man’s first deeds and achievements, practically all writers of the present then proceed to draw very largely upon their imagination, which happens to be cast into the thought patterns of evolutionistic conceptions.” Simply put, the assumption is that man is gradually evolving, when the Bible declares that apart from God he is devolving—into judgment.

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LAMECH AND SETH (2)

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What are cultures like without the influence of Christianity? K.P. Yohannan gives us a glimpse in the following account from *Revolutions in World Missions*: “When commerce had been established with the Fiji islanders, a merchant who was an atheist and skeptic landed on the island to do business. He was talking to the Fiji chief and noticed a Bible and some other paraphernalia of religion around the house.

“‘What a shame,’ he said, ‘that you have listened to this foolish nonsense of the missionaries.’

“The chief replied, ‘Do you see the large white stone over there? That is a stone where just a few years ago we used to smash the heads of our victims to get at their brains. Do you see that large oven over there? That is the oven where just a few years ago we used to bake the bodies of our victims before we feasted upon them. Had we not listened to what you call the nonsense of those missionaries, I assure you that your head would already be smashed on that rock and your body would be baking in that oven.’

“There is no record of the merchant’s response to that explanation of the importance of the Gospel of Christ” (p. 111-112).

When Jim Elliot and the other missionaries took the gospel to the Auca Indians in the jungles of Ecuador, were they welcomed with open arms or with the sharp end of a spear?

The first chapter of Romans states without equivocation that when people reject the knowledge of God that they have from nature, God gives them over to even greater levels of depravity.

Genesis 4:19-24 describes the culture of Lamech’s day. In verse 19 we see the first recorded bigamist; in verse 20 we have the originator of cattle ranching; in verse 21 there is mention of the father of music; verse 22 tells of the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron; verses 23-24 show Lamech’s violence and arrogance. Unbelievers have great talents and skills that they employ; the problem is that they don’t utilize them for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom. Think of the architects, athletes, writers, musicians, et al who make a name for themselves, but deny God, or even blaspheme His name. It’s always a tragedy when beautiful accomplishments serve such ugly ends.

“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. If Cain’s revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech’s is seventy-sevenfold’” (vv. 23-24). For a mere wound, Lamech over-reacts and kills the young man. And if that wasn’t bad enough, Lamech boasts that if anybody tries to bring about justice against him, he himself will do more than even God does—he will exact revenge, not sevenfold, but seventy-sevenfold. This is the last we hear about Cain’s line until chapter six, when God prepares to wipe them off the face of the earth in the flood.

By way of contrast, Genesis 4:25-26 records the birth of Seth, who replaces Abel, and reestablishes the godly line. If you read Luke 3:38 and work your way backwards to verse 23, you will see that Jesus is from the line of Seth.

“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” (Gen. 4:26). Note that unbelievers are described in terms of their achievements and skills, while believers are described in terms of their worship.

What do you parents pray for your children? Do you pray that they will have successful careers? There is nothing wrong with that of course, but I hope your greatest burden and prayer is that they will walk with the Lord. Assuming that your prayer is for your children to live godly lives, don’t underestimate the effect that different cultures (whether it’s church culture or a school culture, etc.) will have upon them. God warned the Israelites, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes” (Lev. 18:3). The LORD knew Israel would be tempted to acquiesce to the surrounding culture—but they must resist.

Cultures, including subcultures, have a powerful influence upon those who are part of them. Take music for example, the 18th century Scottish political thinker Andrew Fletcher said, “Give me the making of the songs of a nation, and I care not who writes its laws.” Fletcher understood the almost hypnotic affect of music to shape the values and philosophy of a people. And this is just one example out of thousands that we could consider.

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