

SESSION 37: AN UNHOLY FAMILY

Genesis 4:17-24

August 4, 2024

PREFACE

H. C. Leupold explains that with v16 in Genesis 4, we have now inaugurated a new chapter in the history of man—in fact, it is the chapter in which mankind *still* dwells.

Leupold: Not without reason the fathers saw in these first sons of Adam prototypes of the two divisions into which the human race is divided ever since: the church and the world. The antagonism between the two began at this point and is characteristic of all human history ever since. This is a point of view clearly maintained by the New Testament. There the opposition of Cain to Abel is traced to the fact that "his works were evil and his brother's were righteous," and at the same time it is stated that "Cain was of the evil one" (1Jo 3:11-12).

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous. (1 John 3:11–12)

Leupold: It was more than a momentary flash of anger that revealed itself in Cain's deed. A basic change of heart had taken place in him, a shift of allegiance to "the evil one." Since such opposition is fundamental, it is the beginning of the tragic division of the race that is in reality the explanation of a good bit of the history of the world.

Professor Leupold wrote that in 1942, and eighty-two years later it is a fundamental truth as evident now as then—even more so. The departure of Cain into the east, after his unrepentant killing of his brother, was the first footfall toward the societal, cultural, and spiritual divide that exists today:

- God's eternal system vs. Satan's temporal system;
- those who worship God, and those who worship other "gods";
- those pursuing righteousness, and those pursuing evil;
- those obeying God, and those obeying only self.

Read Genesis 4:16-22

Then Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son.

Verse 17 does not tell us

- when Cain married (presumably a sister),
- whether or not they had children before this, or
- when he began building a “city”—which could have been as modest as a mud brick wall around a couple of houses.

All we know for a time frame is that the conception and the building of the city occurred after Yahweh sent him away from Eden.

Regarding this “city,” frankly, I am astonished by the NIVs’ translations of late. I have made it no secret that I consider the NIV usually the *least* of our popular versions, but recently, repeatedly, it has come in as one of the more accurate translations of the text! And here is one more case in point: “Cain was then building a city...” This is more important than you might think at first. Most of our versions say that Cain “built” a city—implied, completed and lived there, which naturally raises questions about the fulfillment of God’s curse that he would be a “vagrant and wanderer.”

If Cain “built” a city, that sounds as if he is no longer a wanderer. But the Hebrew (*wayhiy boneh*) can also be translated “he was building,” indicating a process that was probably not completed (as K&D and Leupold interpret it). So the construction of the enclosure could be seen as Cain’s attempt to *thwart* Yahweh’s curse. And if he never completed it nor settled there, it could be seen as Yahweh thwarting *Cain’s* attempt. 📧

And it is probably an indicator of his reputation as a brother-killer that Cain names the city not after himself, but his son. The fewer who know who he is and where he lives the better.

Another tie-in to the idea of this being a city of refuge for Cain is the Hebrew word for city used here—*ir* (EE-er)—which is from the root *ur* (OO-er), “to rouse” or “to raise an alarm.” This points to the city as a place of refuge when an alarm might be raised.

The building of his “city,” completed or not, does not nullify God’s curse and prophecy. He could have built the settlement, even finished it, but then have been forced to move on later, still the wanderer, ever the vagrant.

Now to Enoch (hah-NOOK) was born Irad (ee-RAHD), and Irad was the father of Mehujael (mah-HU-ya-el), and Mehujael was the father of Methushael (meh-tu-shah-el), and Methushael was the father of Lamech (LEH-meck).

The Names

It can be confusing any time one digs into the several name lists in the Bible, for there are names—similar, and some times identical—that appear in more than one. For instance, a comparison of the names descended from Cain and those descended from his brother Seth reveals some that are similar (Enoch and Enosh) and some that are identical (Lamech and Lamech).

Some scholars claim that this means the ancient names are drawn from a single source—i.e., that over time the lists have become corrupted and confused. But that needn't be the case; after all, how many “Davids” are there in the world. And when one takes into account interaction and communication between families, of course they could reuse names, or create individualized variants of a favorite ancestor's name.

Nonetheless, one has to pay attention to context and, more important than that, the correct starting point (or at least immediate progenitor) for the common names. Let's take Lamech for one example, Cain's great-great-great-great grandson, who becomes the central figure as this episode comes to an end in v24.

If one does a search for the name, one finds the first occurrence in this passage: Genesis 4:18-24. He is a descendant of Cain, son of Adam. When one turns the page to Chapter Five, one finds the name again listed in vv25-28, and at the top of the list is Adam, so one might gather from this that the two Lamechs are the same man. But in Chapter Four the Lamech is descended from Cain, while the Lamech in Chapter Five is descended from one of Adam's other sons, Seth (v3).

The Lamech descended from Cain is a chip off Cain's block; he is no good, and never heard from again. The Lamech descended from Seth will become the father of Noah, and the grandfather of the three important tribes of the Middle East; more importantly, however, he is included in the lineage of the Messiah, Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth.

Read Luke 3:23, 36-38.

Luke's lineage works *backward* toward the original progenitor, while a similar list in 1 Chronicles 1, works *forward* from Adam and Seth.

What these various lists reveal is that whatever Eve imagined for her first son, Cain, he would *not* be the seed to “bruise [the serpent] on the head” (3:15). His line would come to an abrupt end (at least in the biblical chronicles) because it would be one not of God but of the world. Cain did not just make a mistake; he “was of the evil one,” “his deeds were evil” (1 John 3:11-12), and his line will go nowhere in God's economy.

By contrast his brother Seth will indeed inaugurate the line from which will eventually spring forth the Messiah—the one who *would* “bruise [the serpent] on the head.”

vv19-22

The narrative now skips forward several generations to focus on Lamech and his line. And though it is relatively subtle, the picture is one of these descendants of Cain living out their lives focused not on things above, but on the things of this earth. ➡

First off, Lamech invents polygyny by taking two wives, thus corrupting the ideal standard set by God of a man and woman becoming one flesh. The names of both wives reveal an attention to the physical, and the sensual: **Adah** (from the root *ada*): to bedeck, ornament, or remove a garment; **Zillah**: the shady or the tinkling (perhaps from her adornment). ➡

vv20-21

Before long Lamech has four children from his two wives. His wife Adah delivers Jabal (yah-val), who will be “the father”—i.e., the “originator” or “ancestor”—of herdsmen; apparently it was he who hit upon the idea of living in a portable tent so as to travel about in search of pasturage for his flocks and herds. Then Adah delivers a second son, Jubal (yoo-val), the root of which means to produce, to bring forth—in this instance, sound from musical instruments. Again, he is the “father,” the originator of musicians. We get our word “jubilate,” to shout for joy, from his name.

It is not obvious from the printed page, but this is because we too are residents grounded in this earth; our spirits may soar with Christ, but our feet remain firmly planted in the soil. But the contrast is clear when one compares it to the picture of Adam and Eve originally in pleasant communion with Yahweh in the garden, and their son Abel making an acceptable offering to Him.

Keep in mind that all these names are the rough Hebrew equivalent of original names we do not know, in a language unknown to us—and, perhaps, even to Moses. Leupold: “It appears that many of the names of these early days may not originally have been given, to their bearers, but may have originated in the course of time as descriptive of the outstanding characteristic of the person.”

v22

As for Zillah, she also gave birth to Tubal-cain, the forger of all implements of bronze and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

Lamech's second wife gives him another son and a daughter. And the occupation of this third son—Tuval-kine—just may play a role in the poem or song that closes out this episode. There are some intriguing threads hidden here beneath the surface of our common translations of v22.

The LSB says that Tubal-cain was the “forger of all implements of bronze and iron,” and our other versions have subtle variations on this (I have no idea why the KJVs have “instructor”—unless by that they mean he was the first and subsequently taught others his craft, which we can assume to be true). Actually a more literal picture of his craft would be “hammering all kinds of cutting things in brass and iron” (K&D) or “the hammerer of every cutting device of bronze and iron” (Leupold). Since “cain” means spear or lance, this could have been a surname given him because of his profession, i.e., “Tubal the spear forger.”

The use of a variant of this word by Isaiah hints at a measure of darkness in Tubal-cain's craft; in Isaiah 3:3 it is translated, “the skillful enchanter.” And some interpretations of Lamech's song suggest that he could have assumed that the weapons created by his son held an enchanted power.

vv23-24

And Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice, You wives of Lamech, Give ear to my word, For I have killed a man for striking me; And a boy for wounding me; If Cain is avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

This has been a troublesome passage ever since it was written, with commentators' interpretations all over the place. Regarding v23, one's interpretation boils down to whether Lamech is speaking about something he has already done—implied by the past tense used in all our versions—or boldly declaring what he *will* or *can* do (in other words, a boast)—which is offered as an alternate reading in the LSB/NASB footnote, “or kill,” and even more specifically in the original NIV: “or I will kill.” It is toward this latter interpretation I lean.

As mentioned earlier, this entire narrative about Cain and his descendants, from vv8-24 in Chapter Four, describes Cain as a self-centered, willful, unrepentant scoundrel, and at least one purpose for its inclusion in Scripture is to show the contrast between the unrighteous, worldly line that emanates from Cain, and the righteous line that leads from Seth to King David, and then to Jesus (Luke 3).

In keeping with that difference, we see Lamech as a worldly, boastful individual who has placed his hope in the beauty and strength of worldly things:

- he has selected not one, but two wives for their appearance;
- his daughter is named Naamah, which means pleasantness, pleasure, lovely or graceful;
- his sons have taken up useful, practical, pursuits that are also rooted in the strengths and wealth of this world: flocks and herds (wealth), entertainment, and the crafting of implements for agriculture and war.

It is this last that segues into Lamech's boasting song. Even if it does speak in the past tense—"I have killed"—it does not speak of the equitable retribution that will later be prescribed by the Law. Leupold sees the man picking up one of his son's just-forged weapons (from the previous verse), brandishing it about as he utters a poetic threat to those who would dare threaten him with injury.

*K&D: The perfect [tense] is expressive not of a deed accomplished, but of confident assurance; and the suffixes are to be taken in a passive sense. The idea is this: *Whoever inflicts a wound or stripe on me, whether man or youth, I will put to death; and for every injury done to my person, I will take ten times more vengeance than that with which God promised to avenge the murder of my ancestor Cain.* In this song—which contains in its rhythm, its strophic arrangement of the thoughts, and its poetic diction, the germ of the later poetry—we may detect "that Titanic arrogance, of which the Bible says that its power is its god (Hab. 1:11), and that it carries its god, viz., its sword, in its hand (Job 12:6)" (Delitzsch) (emphasis added).*

Here we have the voice of the fallen world, celebrating *itself* rather than Yahweh God, and a life pursued for itself rather than for Him.

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A New Chapter in the History of Man

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Cain's City

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