

THE CHILDREN OF THE WORLD

Genesis 4:17–26

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Genesis 4:17–26 (NIV)

“Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech. Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain’s sister was Naamah. Lamech said to his wives, ‘Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.’ Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, ‘God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.’ Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord.”

I’d initially planned to preach from Genesis 4:17 on through Genesis 5, thinking perhaps with the amounts of names and genealogies that are here it might be wise to take these at a rapid speed. However, I’ve been so intrigued with chapter 4 this week that we will stop with Genesis 4:26. I suppose our initial reaction to genealogical records in Scripture and the recitation of names is that they tend to bore us somewhat. As one minister said who was preaching through a

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genealogical list: “So and so, so and so...and they kept on begetting until the next page about the middle of the way down, and we’ll begin to read there.” That’s often how we look at the lists.

Two genealogies in chapters 4 and 5—namely of Cain and Seth—are so important. One reason is that they show us the unity of the human race. That is, all of mankind is descended from one family. Indeed, Paul makes a strong point of this in the Book of Acts when he is at Athens and he’s talking to the philosophers on Mars Hill. He says, “From one, God has made every family which dwells upon the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26). As we indicated earlier when looking at Genesis 2, the biblical record of the history of man is not that we evolved from many different ancestors, but that mankind comes from one headship. One man and woman. Therefore, the Christian has no room for racial prejudice or ethnic prejudice or national pride as opposed to someone who belongs to a different nation. Indeed, in God’s eyes we are all created brothers and sisters in this world. God has made the human race of one. Genesis will give us the sorry record of how the human race got chopped up into divisions. But that was not God’s original intent for mankind.

I. When we look at a story like Cain and his descendants and the descendants of Seth, we see that in reality and from the Bible’s point of view there are really only two divisions that exist among men.

From the world’s standpoint there are all kinds of divisions. We have the division of sex, race, nation, the poor and the rich. We have all kinds of divisions. But the Scriptures only know of one division: the division of the faithful—the children of promise—and the children of disobedience or the children of the world. This division is nowhere more clearly reflected than here in Genesis 4 and 5.

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Because of Cain's sin, certain punishments were brought against him. When he receives God's punishment, Cain is told two things by God. One is that the ground that he took pride in and from which he derived his strength was to turn against him and be a curse to him. The second thing was that he was now to be a fugitive and a wanderer. Indeed Genesis 4:16 indicates that he dwells in the land of Nod, which literally means "place of wandering." Cain chooses to read the judgment of God more severely than God himself had dealt it. Cain chooses to say that not only is it true that the ground is cursed and he is to be a wanderer, but he also says that from now on God's face is going to be hidden from him; no longer would he have contact with God.

Cain begins to show the kind of strain that occurs in a man that draws away from God. Cain begins to stand on his own ability to correct the wrong, to ameliorate in some way the wrong he has committed. He begins to become self-sufficient.

I think Cain winds up being the first practical atheist. Cain was not an atheist in the pure sense, for he certainly knew God existed. Indeed, he'd had conversations with God. But he begins to live out his life in such a way as to indicate that he does not believe God is involved with him in his daily affairs. He keeps God at a distance.

Maybe you have the tendency to do that. If you ask the average person today, "Do you believe in God?" the answer is yes. But then follow through and ask, "Do you practice the presence of God in your life?" That's another matter. Cain shows that on the one hand he intellectually believes in God, but experientially he does not.

God said to him, "You're to be a fugitive and a wanderer." Cain begins wandering, but before long he begins to see that this wandering doesn't set well with him. He will try to take his wandering heart and place himself down geographically in one situation.

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II. The biblical text in Genesis says that after the birth of his son Enoch, Cain began to build a city.

Here is the beginning of urban civilization. The city would be nothing like a modern city; perhaps it would be just a settlement. But evidently, this was the first experience in having persons live together in a social arrangement with a broader unit than the immediate family. He began to have others collect with him in a settlement. He began to build a city.

There are tremendous implications in this. In his heart he is a fugitive. In his heart he is wandering. In his heart he is not able to get things together and he cannot be satisfied with what he is. But he chooses to try to turn aside the judgment of God by saying, “Even though I am to be a fugitive, I will nevertheless stay. I will settle down and be in one place. I will try to make it on my own.” Cain begins what has been kind of a tradition of city life from this day until now.

The city has always been a place where human beings have collected. If they have problems, these problems will show most sharply in the city. This is true whether you look at ancient cities or modern cities. Where are the greatest problems of crime today? They’re in the city. Where is the problem of racial prejudice most sharply accentuated? In the city. Where are slums and poverty most likely to be found? In the city. Where is injustice and crime?

Cain was trying to build a society without God. He tried to build a society in a place where he had not personally experienced what it was to be in relationship to God—to have a heartfelt forgiveness and acceptance from God. Because he sought on his own to build the city, you can guess that the product of his life would produce a kind of culture that winds up with all sorts of problems.

Cain is the first man in Scripture to try to build a city. And all through Scripture we can see a conflict between the city of man and the city of God. The city that man tries to build— the

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culture that man tries to build—will inevitably fall short because it is not patterned after the qualities that God would want. But God reserves a city. We're given an idea of what God's city is like at the end of the Bible. The Scriptures begin by describing a city of man in Genesis 4; they end by describing a city of God in Revelation 21: "I saw the Holy City." Holy. Can you think of any city that you know to which this adjective could be given? As good as our town is, that adjective is wholly out of place.

New Jerusalem, city of peace. Can you think of a modern urban center that has peace? Coming down out of heaven from God. All of man's cities have been built from the ground up. Because they're built out of substances that decay, they turn into decadence architecturally and morally. God's city is fully completed when it comes. It is finished. It comes down instead of rising up. It is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. It's beautiful. It has no slums, no problem with litter, no problem with ugliness in architectural design or anything like that. It's beautiful.

Furthermore, it is a place where God dwells—which is different from the city of Cain. The dwelling place of God is with men. Revelation 21:4 says, "He will wipe away every tear from their eye and death shall be no more, neither mourning nor crying nor pain any more." Hospitals and mortuaries are passed away.

I've been thinking about the institutions that have come into being as a result of a city—the city of Cain. These institutions will not be present in the city of God. The first I could think of is government. Why do we have city government? The reason we have government is that not everybody in our community is trustworthy. Somebody is liable to come along and take advantage. Somebody is liable to come along and build something that protrudes right out onto your property. Somebody is liable to come along and take advantage of your rights. So we need some kind of force to make sure there's a semblance of justice in the city. We need government.

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We need things like police and courts to back what is done in law enforcement. Do you need this in the city of God? We need hospitals and mortuaries. Do we need this in the city of God?

Obviously not! The biblical city is one that is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

The earthly city has great advantages, but it also has tremendous liabilities. It will forever be an imperfect institution. Indeed, the whole civilization and culture of man will be forever imperfect.

That's what's being said about Cain. If you're looking for hope or justice to come into the world through man's hands, you will find that it cannot be.

I am struck with a phrase in Hebrews 11:10 that describes Abraham: "He looked for a city whose builder and maker was God." He knew that the answers to the fundamental problems in life could not be solved on the human level.

I think of *The Christian Century*, a liberal journal. At the turn of the century, liberal Protestantism was on the rise and saying things like, "Now that we understand the implications of the gospel to society, we do not need to see the second coming of the Lord take place. If we're not certain of His resurrection, how can we be certain if He's going to come again? What will happen is that humanist Christians will become alive and aware, and within our century we will see racial injustice ended; slums will end because of decent housing, and wars will cease. This century will be the 'Christian century.'" So the magazine was named.

If you're ever looking for a false prophet, the Bible says you'll know if a prophet is true by whether or not his words come to pass. Here is a masthead on a popular interdenominational, liberal magazine that says, "This is the Christian century." Yet the city of Cain is saying, "Society can never get it together. Human life can never get it together without God."

Cain hopes to find healing in a city. Since he doesn't have a relationship with God, he thinks he can find it in relationship to others. But his effort is doomed to failure. We go through a series of

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names and finally come to Lamech, which is the seventh generation from Adam. It is in Lamech we see the degeneration of Cain's line. Cain begins to walk away from God, but when the line has come all the way to this man, Lamech, the deterioration from God becomes total.

III. Lamech introduces three things within human culture that are important to note—things that are unlike God or have potential for evil.

A. One thing that Lamech introduces is polygamy. He has two wives—Adah and Zillah. This is a direct disagreement and disobedience to the word God spoke to Adam and Eve in the Garden in Genesis 2:24: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, and they two shall become one flesh.”

Here is a man who is walking away from God totally, and it's reflected in his moral life. He has no more sensitivity toward another human being than to complicate his life by having two wives at the same time. *Adah* in the Hebrew means “ornament.” Maybe that's suggestive of how he took her, just as many modern men take women simply as a decoration to wear on one's arm or show off. *Zillah* evidently means “shadow.”

Here was a person who was unable to get with it in his family life and was very clearly walking away from the Lord in disobedience. Polygamy is recognized throughout the Old Testament. You find references to polygamy even among the faithful toward God. But the Scriptures are very clear as to its roots and where it came from. It came as a result of a man who is out of relationship with God.

B. A second thing that happens as a permanent contribution of Lamech is that movements within culture are started. Lamech's sons are responsible for three things happening within the culture of the world in that period.

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One of his sons, Jabal, was responsible for the development of persons who lived in tents and kept cattle. In other words, they were nomadic people. They found that by moving around they could have the benefit of the city and be in association with one another, but they didn't get stuck in one place. They were nomads.

A second contribution was from another son, Jubal, who was musical. He made the lyre and the pipe. The lyre was a stringed instrument more like our modern guitar than the harp. The pipe would be a woodwind instrument. In other words, the classification of instruments began to occur. There's a beautiful thing here, by the way. A man whose generation is cursed by the ground is now taking something from the ground and shaping something out of it and making music with it. From the line of Cain we see that music was a contribution.

A third contribution was from Tubal-Cain, a manufacturer. He was a manufacturer of bronze and iron.

Within those three movements of culture there is tremendous potential for good or evil. Let's start with Tubal-Cain, the forger of instruments of bronze and iron. Let's connect that with verse 23, where Lamech is boasting to his wives about his military prowess and how he has killed a young man for striking him. Some have pictured Lamech as standing there holding something made of bronze or iron. Something his son made, he has turned into a weapon. Manufacturing has always held within it the potential of serving man or hurting man. It has the potential for war or for peace. Tubal-Cain makes bronze and iron serve. But in Lamech's hands, those same instruments kill. It's a fundamental human problem, isn't it?

When something in culture is made, it has the terrible potential for good or for evil. It depends on the person who handles it. Eventually, the weapons in the hands of Cain's generation can serve nothing but evil.

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The same kind of thing can be said about music. Music can serve. Music can soothe. Music can build up. Music can inspire. Music can elevate. Music can lift depression. But music can also jumble and jangle. It can depress. It can be used in such a way as to elicit the wrong kinds of responses. It can become hurtful. Music has terrible potential for evil and great potential for good. One of the tasks of Christians is to understand how to appreciate the music that God has given.

What about Jabal with his tents and cattle? Jabal was the first nomad. He loved to travel. He didn't want to settle down. Jabal would have been right at home in Southern California. He would have moved constantly. Had he lived here he would have owned a mobile home or trailer or Winnebago. He would have been on the go.

The nomadic life also has the potential for good or evil. It can be used positively for the family to get together and rest and relax and be together in an outdoor setting. It can also be terribly hurtful if one turns it into selfishness. So many people who are into constant traveling never settle down in service to God, to the church, to others. Instead they are constantly selfish in extracting life for themselves, but they never give to someone else. Within these streams of culture you see these potentials.

Something in culture may not in and of itself be evil. For instance, TVs. TVs aren't wrong, depending on how you use them. They have terrible potential, and they have great potential.

They can inform or they can destroy. The thing is neutral. It's how we use it and respond to it.

C. We see another thing that either Lamech or his children is responsible for introducing. First was polygamy; secondly was movement within culture. Now, thirdly, we see violence typified in Lamech's approach to life. He calls his two wives and starts boasting about his strength. A young man attacked and wounded him, and in striking back Lamech killed the young man.

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This is the first recorded poem after the fall of Adam and Eve. In the first poem in human literature, you have two things being glorified: sex and violence. You see the sex aspect as Lamech is standing there with his two wives, beating himself on the chest, flexing his arms, and saying, “I am great Lamech. Look at me. Look at the tough husband you’ve got. Ain’t I a winner?” The rest of the poem is about violence.

Here’s why the Bible is such an incredible Book. It delineates what’s wrong and what can be right with man. What books on the market today sell the most? Books that glorify sex and violence. Which movies do most people go to? Movies that emphasize sex and violence. Which magazines do most people want to buy? Magazines that in one way or another have a story related to sex and violence.

Lamech has come a long way from Cain. Cain killed his brother and still needed and asked for the protection of God. But Lamech killed a man and there’s no mention of God. He simply says if Cain is avenged sevenfold then Lamech will avenge seventy-sevenfold. It’s an incredible thing that he’s saying. Cain needed God for a crutch. Cain needed the assurance that if somebody killed him then God would execute judgment on Cain’s murderer seven times more intensively than the murderer had harmed Cain. But as for Lamech, he says, “I can take care of myself. And if anybody moves against me, I’ll avenge seventy-sevenfold. God’s not as big as I am. I can lick my problems a lot better than God. Too bad Cain had that fragile tie with God. I’ve come a long way, baby!”

There is insolence in Lamech’s attitude toward God. It’s fascinating that in Matthew 18:21–22, Peter asked the Lord how many times one person should forgive another person. Peter says, “Seven times?” And the Lord says, “No, seventy times seven.” I wonder if there isn’t some

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connection between that statement of the Lord and this passage here. The man of the world—his object is vengeance. But the man of God’s object is forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing.

IV. Another way

Here is the culture of Cain, and we see that it’s a dead-end street. In Genesis 5 we go on with the line of Adam through Seth, and it’s a continuous thread of genealogical history that extends down to Jesus Christ. Cain’s line with Lamech and his sons comes to a close suggesting that there is no future in that aspect of mankind. Lamech and his sons may have gone on and had children, but effectively his line comes to an end from the viewpoint of faith. History is going nowhere with that family. There’s no use tracing its destiny. In its early ages its character has already manifested itself.

But with the line of Seth, something else emerges. In Genesis 4:25–26 we read that Adam knew his wife again. We should realize that verse 25 probably doesn’t come chronologically after verse 24. Seven generations of Adam did not pass before Adam again has a child with his wife Eve. Rather, verse 25 should probably be read parallel to verse 17. Cain knew his wife, and they had a son. But Adam and Eve perceived that God was not going to work through that line of the family, so they have another child named Seth. “Seth” means “appointed.” He is appointed to take the place of Abel.

Again this shows that there are only two divisions—Cain or Seth. The children of promise or the children of the world. God appoints Seth to take on the responsibility.

One other word about Lamech: he’s the seventh from Adam. In chapter 5 we find that in the line through Seth, Enoch is the seventh from Adam. While I don’t think one could make a case from Scripture that they lived at the same time, I think it’s significant that both are in seventh place.

On the one hand, people are degenerating and the world, in a sense, is going to pot with Lamech.

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In another way and in an entirely different manner, there are people who walked the life of faith like Enoch, people who walked with God.

That's really what we as Christians are called upon to do. In the midst of a wicked and perverse generation, you're called upon to walk with God. Through Enoch will come the Christ as we see in Luke 3.

With the birth of Seth's son, Enosh, will come a rather unique statement. "Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" (Genesis 4:26, NIV). What's so significant about that verse?

There are two ways of naming God. One way is to name Him in a general sense. "I believe a God exists" or "There is God." The names of some of Cain's children even have within them the mention of God. For example, a Hebrew word for God is *El*. In Genesis 4:18 you'll find Mehujael and Methushael. "El" ends both names, indicating that God was a part of their names. Yet it was God only in a general sense.

When we come to verse 26—"At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD"—the reference to God there speaks of Jehovah, the God who reveals himself personally. It's like saying, "I know there is a God" or saying, "I know that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and has personally revealed himself to me." To say "I know there is a God" means that you believe there is a God somewhere out and up there. But to call Him by His name, the personal name by which He reveals himself, is to know Him. In the third generation from Adam, men began to call upon the name of Jehovah. They began to know Him and relate to Him. On the one hand with Lamech, people are moving away from God. With Enoch in the line of Seth, they are moving toward God.

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The children of Seth became the instruments through whom God can rescue the world. God has two lines, and both are witnesses that are moving in human history. We're a part of one or the other. One part of human history and human experience is moving away from God. The other part is moving toward God. They are children of promise.

All of us have responsibilities that live on long after our lifetimes. If we'll be true and faithful children of promise, God can take our lives and use them for His glory.

Closing Prayer

How exciting it is, Lord, to look again at Your Word today and find how closely it speaks to us in our lives. We thank You, Lord, that within this congregation You have many appointed children. We also recognize that by Your grace it's not the family tree we belong to that makes us a Christian, but in every generation we have a choice. It's great to know that when we make those choices for You, we can have an influence upon our children. While they still must make the choice, nevertheless, because of our faith, they have more possibility to see what it is to be healthy and whole and be Your children.

I pray, Lord, for persons who may be first-generation Christians—who do not know anyone in their background who was Christian. But in their own lifetime they've taken a stand and chosen to become part of the family of God. I pray that You would cause their testimony to endure and that it would endure way beyond them should You tarry. May they have an influence for You in the years to come.

I pray for others, Lord, who may come from Christian backgrounds. Often those raised in Christian homes don't understand what it would be like to have been raised without knowing You. Sometimes, Lord, it's easy for those of us who have been brought up in Christian homes to see all the faults with parents and faults in the church and not recognize that these faults are

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minor compared to the kinds of problems we would have if we'd been brought up in a family that didn't know You at all.

I pray for young people—that with their zeal to do right there would also be compassion and an understanding of what it is to be motivated by the grace of God. You somehow love us and care for us in spite of all of our limitations and failures. I pray, Lord, that we will be covered by grace, not only in respect to us but also in respect to each other. As You did with Cain, let us not mete out punishment that could be given, but instead give mercy and kindness and tenderness and love. When our hearts grow cold and indifferent and spiteful, we pray that by the grace of Your Holy Spirit You would plow into the hardness within us and cause our inner lives to spring forth with a tender love and compassion toward each other.

Now, more than ever, may we be a part of the family of God in a very real way—to be in the line of people who walk with You, who know You in a deep and intimate way. With that we would be grateful. In the many fields represented here—at school and the occupations held by people—may we have a relationship with You and let Your life show through ours. Let us be all that You've called us to be. Melt away all sin and rebellion toward You. Let obedience and love flow like two great rivers from our hearts. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, we give thanks. Amen.