

Genesis 4b: Further Generations

2/16/2001 10:45 AM

Overview

When Adam begat Cain and Abel (4:1-2), we saw immediately the possibility of two streams of humanity:

- The seed of the woman, worshipping God
- The seed of the serpent, persecuting the seed of the woman.

In this chapter we have two echoes of this childbirth language (4:17, 25). The first shows the continued proliferation of depravity, as Cain's seed, while intelligent and creative, continue in his sin: continuation of the seed of the serpent. The second shows another instance of the seed of the woman, seeking after God.

17-24, Cain's Lineage

Structure

String of "begats" interspersed with occasional pearls. We will focus on these pearls.

Final generation spreads out into three: cf. Noah (5:32); Terah (11:26). Thus we are not being given all the descendants at each level. Rather, the narrator wants to carry us over a long stretch of history to get to the next major focus area, and we know we've arrived when he spreads out the coverage. Like driving a car: if you're going fast, you can only watch the road immediately in front of you, but if you slow down, you can see more of the scenery.

Watch out for assigning meaning to names. Recall sermon by Ray Stedman of Peninsula Bible Church in which he took each name in a genealogy, assigned it a meaning, turned the meanings into a sentence, and took that as the message of the entire passage. There is a long tradition of such "hidden" meanings in Scripture, going back to the Kabala and continuing down to the "Bible Code" fad of a few years ago. There are two problems with such approaches

1. *Scientific*: these methods rarely survive any objective examination. They are palettes with which you can paint any story you want, not an objective method to which we can submit. The "Bible Code" is statistically irrelevant, and can be used to find anything you want. In the case of names, there is often more than one way to read a name; e.g.,
 - Mehujael = "blotted out by God," "God gives life," "priest of God"?
 - Methusael = "man of {God, Sheol, desire, prayer}"
2. *Spiritual*: Deut. 29:29. God's revelation is partial, plain, and practical. What he has revealed, is straightforward. It is in human language. You have to learn to read to access it, but you do not need to solve puzzles.

The pearls in this case are at the ends of the string: the record of Cain's city-building, and the history of Lamech. These have two great themes: the birth of culture, and the persistence of sin.

The Birth of Culture

We are immediately struck by the flowering of cultural among Cain and his descendants.

- 17, Cain himself builds the first city. (Is this an effort to frustrate the divine judgment that he will be a fugitive and a vagabond?)
- The children of his descendant Lamech are noted for their cultural creativity, 20-22:
 - The invention of the tent, making possible a nomadic lifestyle (Abel already was a shepherd, but not a nomadic one).
 - Musical instruments
 - Metalworking
- Lamech himself invents poetry. 23-24 is the first extended example of parallelistic poetry in the Bible.

Given that we have the two lines side by side, we should recognize that culture originates not among the seed of the woman, but among the seed of the serpent.

- Luke 16:8, “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.”
- Leupold: “Those alienated from God ... being addicted and devoted to the things of the world, ... do all in their power to make an empty existence attractive by the cultivation of the natural resources of the world.”

God can redeem elements of culture and use them for his purposes:

- the tabernacle was a tent;
- musical instruments feature prominently in the temple worship;
- Bezaleel and Aholiab, the tabernacle craftsmen, were skilled in metalwork;
- The Spirit of God spoke through David, Solomon, and most of the prophets in poetic form.

Still, we must recognize that it is the ungodly who typically excel in cultural activities, and we must not mistake cultural excellence for godliness, nor despise those who though culturally simple are devoted to the Lord.

The Persistence of Sin

The text has already given abundant evidence of Cain’s depravity. In the history of his descendant Lamech we see that this depravity continues down through the race, evidenced in two ways:

- origin of bigamy
- Vengeful spirit

Bigamy.—“Lamech took unto him two wives.” God gave Adam only one, and even Cain followed this example, to judge by v.17. Contrary to popular opinion, polygamy is not common in the OT. There are only two documented cases of polygamy before the flood, two among the patriarchs, and 13 in Israel, less than 20 in all. In fact, it is reasonable to read Lev 18:18 as

forbidding it outright. But Lamech was not satisfied with a single wife, and introduced the perversion that persists in the impurity of our own day.

Vengeful spirit.—We have already noted Lamech’s penchant for poetry. What a sorry theme he picks for the world’s first poem! Note the parallel pairs:

Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice;
ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:

for I have slain a man to my wounding,
and a young man to my hurt.

24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

It has reasonably been suggested that this song reports his experience with the product of Tubal-Cain’s art, a sword. Having proven the force of such a weapon in one altercation, he is full of confidence about the future, and he does not need God’s promise to protect him. “My fist shall do more for me than God’s vengeance for Cain.”

This passage is probably the source of our Lord’s rebuke to Peter in Matt 18:22. The unbeliever seeks a plenitude of vengeance; the believer is capable of an equal plenitude of forgiveness.

25-26, Seth

25, Birth

Eve’s attitude on the birth of Seth is much more sober than at the birth of Cain and Abel.

Contrast each element of her claim:

	4:1,2	4:25
Subject	“I have ...” emphasizes what she has done.	“God hath ...” gives the credit to God.
Verb	“Gotten”: The archaic use in the sense “created, formed” makes this a boast of her accomplishment.	“Appointed”: Recognizes her dependence on the sovereign will of God.
Object	“A man,” even though it was only an infant. Does not acknowledge the distinction implicit in 3:15.	“Another seed,” a more appropriate term, and also more directly reflecting the promise of 3:15.
God’s Role	“with the Lord,” almost on parity with her.	The sovereign creator, the active one in the event.

Her description of Seth as “another seed, instead of Abel,” suggests that she recognizes that Abel (in contrast to Cain) was distinctively one of the promised seed.

26a, Seth's Son

Seth is even more modest in naming his son. "Enos" is just a Hebrew word for man, but a word that emphasizes the weakness and impotence of humanity. He knows from his family history how frail the race is, and seeks to inculcate in his son an awareness of that weakness.

26b, "then began men to call upon the name of the Lord"

There are two questions here:

1. Just what were people doing in this activity?
2. Why is it said to begin only with Seth?

What does the expression mean?

This is a common expression in Genesis: Note that Abraham and Isaac associate it with building an altar or planting a tree (not "grove," which everywhere else in AV is *asherah*, a wooden idol representing a Canaanite goddess).

- 4:26, Seth's descendants
- Abraham
 - 12:8, Bethel
 - 13:4, Bethel
 - 21:33, Beer Sheba
- 26:25, Isaac at Beer-Sheba

With object:

- *to summon, Exod 31:2 (Bezaleel), Est 2:14*
- *to name, Num 32:38 (cities)*
- *Isa 65:1, a people called by my name*

The idiom here (with no direct object) has two senses.

- We are likely to associate it with petition, and it clearly bears this sense in the episode of Elijah on Mt. Carmel (1 K 18:22-38); cf. also Joel 2:32 (MT 3:5); cf. Zech 13:9.
- But God himself is said to do this, Exod 33:19; 34:5, and this is hardly petition.
- An excellent parallel is Isa 12:4; see also 1 Chr 16:8 = Ps 105:1. *See Ps 49:12; Isa 43:1; 45:3 for connection of this with naming.*
- Parallel in Zeph 3:9 with serving the Lord, an expression that refers to worship in the temple or tabernacle.

The common feature of all these is the public proclamation of the name of the Lord.

- Thus the altars and trees of the patriarchal narratives.
- Associated with praise in Isa 12:4, and worship.

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- The phrase is applicable to the petition of Elijah because it is public. A prayer in his closet could hardly have been described as “calling on the name of the Lord.”

Thus this is probably better described as “making proclamation *with* the name of the Lord,” crying aloud (the sense of “call”) while uttering the Lord’s name. The expression describes public worship, not private devotion.

Why does it start here?

We have good evidence that Adam and his wife trusted in the Lord, and both Cain and Abel brought offerings to the Lord. Why then does Moses say that public worship begins with the descendants of Seth?

Answer: Until the apostasy of Cain and his line, there was no need for a public proclamation of the Lord’s name. Everyone knew the Lord, acknowledged his rule, and worshipped him. Now the seed of the serpent has begun to appear and spread throughout the earth, challenging the Lord’s authority. In this context, it becomes the obligation of God’s people to stand against this apostasy, to make public proclamation of the name of the Lord and thus bear witness to his rule. Moses is here setting forth the concept of “worship as witness.” It is the duty of God’s people to be known as such, to “Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare his doings among the people, make mention that his name is exalted” (Isa 12:4).