

## Genesis 4:17-26

### Richard Phillips on Genesis 4:17-26 (Excerpts)

#### Introduction...

*For murdering his brother Abel, Cain had been cursed by God and sentenced to a life of restless toil (Gen. 4:11–12). But life still went on. In time, “Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch” (v. 17). Genesis 5:4 states that besides the children who are named, Adam and Eve “had other sons and daughters,” and presumably one of these daughters became Cain’s wife.*

*Genesis 4:18 lists four generations that came from this line, during a period of history that must have seen a rapid expansion of human population.*

#### The Hope of Secular Culture

*We may wonder how a man who was cursed by God for sin could nonetheless flourish. The answer is found in God’s common grace.*

This term refers to the general kindness that the Creator bestows on his creatures, both for their good and for his own glorious purposes. Jesus said that God “makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45). *By God’s bounteous provision, the ungodly line of Cain grew and built a civilization.*

*In particular, Cain “built a city” (Gen. 4:17). The implication is that Cain sought to counter the curse of God that he would “be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth” (v. 14) by establishing a more settled home. We need not think of this as a large city, since the word can equally be used of a small, walled town. But we can be sure that with God’s curse upon him, even here Cain did not experience true rest. Nonetheless, here was the beginning of urbanization and the launching of secular culture.*

*The text reveals important features of human culture in Cain’s ungodly line...*

- *First, it was established in rebellion to God’s will.* Remember that God had placed a mark of protection on Cain (Gen. 4:15). Unwilling to trust God’s provision, Cain decided to build a protective city.

***In rejection of the life that God willed for him, Cain sought to settle down, making his way in the world on his own terms. Similarly, self-will in neglect of God's revealed will is a hallmark of secular society.***

- ***Second, we note that Cain named his city after his son Enoch. This name means "dedicated." The idea seems to be that Cain was founding his own line and its society. By naming his city after this son, Cain was showing pride in his family achievements.***

***Later in the Bible, we will discover faithful servants of God founding cities and other important places, and almost without fail they name them in praise of some aspect of God's glory.*** When Abram arrived in the land to which God had called him, for example, he worshiped and named the place "Bethel," or "house of God" (Gen. 12:8). ***In contrast, and in keeping with the pattern of secular culture even today, Cain named his city for what was important to him: the glory of his own achievement and the future greatness of his progeny.***

***Genesis 4:18 provides the names of successive generations in Cain's family: Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, and Lamech. This last figure, the seventh from Adam, is prominent. Whereas Cain had one wife, Lamech had two, Adah and Zillah (Gen. 4:19).***

***Disobedience to God has now advanced in the first recorded instance of polygamy, contrary to God's institution of covenant marriage (2:24).***

Lamech was the first bigamist in history, going against God's original plan for one man and one woman to become one flesh (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-8). ***The names of his wives and daughter show the emphasis in his heart: Adah means, "pleasure, ornament, or beauty." Zillah means, "shade" probably referring to a luxurious covering of hair. His daughter's name was Naamah, which means, "loveliness." Lamech's culture was committed to physical and outward beauty.***

David Guzik

Secular culture has changed little since those early days, as the decadent Western culture today obsesses with the sensual and views women primarily in terms of beauty and sex appeal.

***For all his delight in his wives and daughter, Lamech's true prestige came from the exploits of his three sons.***

The picture is one of rapid advancement. Succeeding generations quickly made progress in areas such as the founding of a city (Genesis 4:17), home building (the father of those who dwell in tents), music and the arts (the father of all those who play the harp and flute), and metalworking (an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron).

Michael Barrett

- First, “Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock” (Gen. 4:20). Abel had kept sheep years before, but Jabal innovated a nomadic system of herding based on movable tent structures.
- Second, “his brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” (v. 21). This son invented the prototypical string and wind instruments, greatly advancing the cause of music and the arts.
- Third, “Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron” (v. 22). Since the word for “forger” means “hammer,” we can see him beating on the blacksmith’s anvil to fashion useful tools.

R. Kent Hughes writes...***“Godless, Cainite civilization birthed massive cultural advances that have enriched all of life.”***

***But...there is no mention of God***

***There is a problem with strictly secular culture—a problem seen in its very name. It is secular, that is, exclusively worldly. No concern is given for the knowledge and worship of God. Cain’s offspring built their own city, according to their own rules and for their own glory. So it has been ever since.***

Matthew Henry writes...

Worldly things are the only things that carnal wicked people set their hearts upon and are most ingenious and industrious about. . . . [Lamech] was a father of shepherds and a father of musicians, but not a father of the faithful. Here was one to teach in brass and iron, but none to teach the good knowledge of the Lord. ***Here were devices how to be rich, and how to be mighty, and how to be merry, but nothing of God.***

## Secularism's Fatal Flaw

***If the account of Cain and his offspring concluded with Genesis 4:22, we might be encouraged in this secular hope. Verses 23–24 reveal, however, a grievous dimension.***

***Here, the proud malice of Lamech reveals the fatal flaw of secular human culture.***

***Amid the celebration of Lamech's sons, the father presents his own boast. For this seventh man in the line of Cain—one who thus summarizes its ethos—the wealth and strength acquired through an advancing culture mean the power to impose his will on others through violence.***

### **Genesis 4:23,24**

***“I have killed a man for wounding me”...The way Lamech boasted about his murder of another, and the way he believed he could promise a greater retribution than God, shows a progressive degeneracy among humanity. Things quickly became worse with the human race, a true devolution.***

David Guzik

**Genesis 4:23,24** “I have slain a man”...***Lamech is bragging in proud and presumptuous self-confidence rather than having any sense of remorse...***in revenge for wounding and hurting him.

Michael Barrett

We can easily imagine Lamech's turning to the audience of his wives, and setting forth his composition, which has been called The Sword Song:

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. (Gen. 4:23–24)

***We have already noted how Lamech flouted God's law by taking two wives. Having thus usurped God's authority in self-will, notice how quickly Lamech proceeds to corrupt the culture of his line.*** Here is music, but not to convey beauty or elevate noble themes. Instead, Lamech's song stirs up the sinful cravings of lust and domination.

**Moreover, it is clear that Lamech has turned to his blacksmith son, Tubal-cain, not merely for useful tools but also for deadly weapons. Indeed, humanity has a strong impulse to turn tools into weapons.**

Lamech's lyric carries a simple and sharp point. God had put a mark of protection on his ancestor Cain, threatening the judgment of death if he were to be murdered. Pointing this out, Lamech boasts that he will claim the right to take human life—and has done so—whenever someone merely injures him. **While God threatened judgment in the cause of protection, Lamech swings his sword out of proud revenge. Here we see the passion fueling his lust: to flout the word of God and usurp God's high place, at least in the matter of violence.**

God had threatened sevenfold retribution to anyone who molested Cain. So Lamech boasts, "If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold" (Gen. 4:24). Indeed, he boasts of slaying not only a grown man who bothered him, but also a boy—"a young man for striking me" (v. 23). **Thus we see not only that the line of Cain advanced culture in the arts and sciences, but that the offspring of a murderer has enculturated a tradition of violence.**

Henri Blocher writes... **"Lamech formulates a rule which his tribe will observe. . . . The descendants of Lamech will think of vengeance in terms of duty."**

David Guzik Comments... "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold"...**This is all a representation of humanism, a man-centered perspective. The city was Cain's city; the focus of Lamech was his beautiful wives and his own perceived strength. But for all of Lamech's boasting, neither he nor his descendants are ever heard of again in the Bible. He came to nothing.**

## **The Hope of Redemptive Culture**

**Where, then, is hope for the world? The answer is given in the final two verses of Genesis 4, a postscript attached with reference to the line of the godly who would emerge from the faith of Adam and Eve:** "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, 'God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him'" (Gen. 4:25).

**Genesis 4:25** “Appointed me another seed instead of Abel”. *Eve continues to hope in the promise of the coming Seed (3:15; 4:1). Seth means “appointed” or “compensation,” and he headed the godly line.*

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*Yet the faith of Adam and Eve in God’s promise shone light into their darkness, and they turned to one another anew to produce a son. Eve named him “Seth,” a word that sounds like the word for “appointed.” She explained, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him” (Gen. 4:25). In the midst of sorrow, Eve renewed her faith in the promise of God that a Savior would come through her seed.*

*In time, Seth grew and had his own son, naming him “Enosh,” meaning “frail” or “feeble.” Trusting in the same promise as his parents, he faced the future, wary of the mortal weakness of his line.*

**Genesis 4:26** “Men began to call upon the name of the LORD”...*After a downward spiral of sin and sadness, this shows that God always has a remnant who love Him and seek His grace in prayer.*

Michael Barrett

**Genesis 4:26** “Then men began to call on the name of the LORD”...*Even in those wicked days, the worship of God was not unknown. Some have called Genesis 4:26 the first revival, because it was the first indication of a spiritual resurgence after a clear decline.*

David Guzik

*Kenneth Mathews writes...“Cain’s firstborn and successors pioneered cities and the civilized arts, but Seth’s firstborn and successors pioneered worship.”*

*Here, we see a great contrast between the line of Seth and that of his brother Cain. Whereas Cain constructed his secular hope in the building of cities and the advancement of worldly culture, Seth and his line secured themselves through the worship of God in saving faith.*

***In saying that Seth's descendants "began to call upon the name of the LORD," we mark the beginning of public, gathered worship of believers in God and his promised salvation....This expression also provides a foundational statement regarding biblical worship. **Worship is the proper response of believing people to what God has revealed about himself and his saving plan.*****

***Note how the narrative resumes with God's covenant name...  
LORD***

***The "name of the LORD" refers to the holy character of God as he has made himself known, together with his merciful purposes in which believers may trust. We have seen that Adam and Eve formed their faith around the promise God had given, looking forward to a Savior through their offspring.***

Today, calling on the name of the Lord means believing the whole revelation of the Bible as it centers on the saving work of Jesus Christ.

***Later in Genesis, Abraham and his heirs were said to call on God's name in the context of making sacrifices. Genesis 12:8 tells us that Abraham "built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD."***

***We may infer, then, that in addition to gathering to praise God for the perfections of his being, Adam, Eve, Seth, Enosh, and his family also made sacrifices like that of Abel when he offered his slain lamb. They were bearing testimony to the gospel hope of a Savior who would die to take away our sins, the hope that was fulfilled at the cross of Jesus Christ.*** Thus it is that the apostle Paul would take up the language of their worship in summoning us to faith in Jesus, saying, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13).

***Here in these two verses at the end of Genesis 4, in the worship of the relatively small remnant community of faith, calling on the name of the Lord in worship and bearing witness to his promise of a Redeemer, we find the hope of the world.***

What Kent Hughes writes of Seth and his line remains true of our gathering as Christ's people today... "When Cainite civilization began to rise and worship at the shrines of abundance and art and technology... when abuse and violence and the devaluation of life became commonplace...when men fancied that they were captains of their souls...

Sethite civilization began to proclaim the name of the Lord, the Captain of their Salvation.

As we invest in the Church, calling on the name of the Lord in prayer and praise, witnessing the gospel and teaching God's Word, raising up believing children and passing a gospel legacy to succeeding generations, we are joined to the long line of faith and salvation that stretches back to Adam, Eve, and Seth and forward to the return of Jesus Christ. ***In the midst of the secular city without hope, we hold forth the true and only hope that is faith in Jesus Christ. In earliest times, it was Adam and Eve with their godly offspring who shined a light in a darkening world. Now it is to us that the apostolic commission falls, as the Bible calls us:***

***Be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life. (Phil. 2:15-16)***

### **Appendix...Two Radically Different Lines of Humanity**

There is a remarkable parallel, as well as contrast, between the two lines: those of Cain and Seth. In order to make this clearer, we shall now present the list of generations of the two lines in parallel arrangement:

Adam .....	Adam
Cain .....	Seth
Enoch .....	Enos
Irak .....	Cainan
Mehujael .....	Mahalaleel
Methusael .....	Jared
Lamech .....	Enoch
Lamech's sons .....	Methuselah, Lamech, Noah, Noah's sons

The first thing we notice here is the striking resemblance of some of the names in the line of Cain to names in the line of Seth. Two of the names, Enoch and Lamech, are identical in the two lines. Several others are remarkably similar. This identity or similarity of names indicates, certainly, that there existed some contact between the two branches of the human race. The resemblance is too great to be explained by mere coincidence. As already stated, we do not know the original language of these names, which must have been the original language of the human race.



Next, we should notice the remarkable contrasts, generation by generation. Cain stands over against Seth, a true example of the seed of the serpent over against the seed of the woman. Enoch, the son of Cain, whose birth was marked by the building of the world's first city, stands over against Enos, the son of Seth, whose birth was marked by the beginning of public worship of Jehovah, the God of salvation. Lamech, of the line of Cain, who was the originator of polygamy and the author of the blasphemous sword song, stands over against Enoch of the line of Seth, who walked with God and was taken to heaven without dying. Tubal-Cain, son of the Cainite Lamech, who made possible the cutting short of human life by the sword, stands over against Methuselah, who attained the greatest age ever reached by man on earth, namely, 969 years.

How obvious it is that there were two kinds of people in the world, and that these two kinds of people differed not superficially, but in radically different spiritual ways! Wicked, atheistic humanism stands over against godly, humble faith in the LORD.

We should realize that humanity is still divided into two camps, the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. True, the descendants of Cain perished in the Flood, and the human race received a new start with the family of Noah. But it was not long after Noah's time that "the seed of the serpent" became prominent in the world again, from among Noah's descendants. And the two kinds of people exist side-by-side in the world today.

**Source...**J G Vos, Genesis

## **Excerpt from the Family Worship Study Guide (Joel Beeke)**

### **Thoughts for Personal/Family Worship: Genesis 4**

1. Grieve at the results of the fall. Chapter 4 reveals the horrible consequences of Adam's sin—his children are infected with the pride, hatred, and deception of the serpent. Yet there is hope, for we also see here the fruit of God's promise (3:15). Satan has his seed among men, but God moves some to trust His promise and worship Him acceptably. Though the godly seed suffers persecution, it will triumph at last.

2. Marvel at God's patience. It is remarkable that God converses patiently with Cain and gives him ample opportunity to repent of his jealousy. Even though his offering has been refused, Cain should have listened to the warnings, but refused. Murder is always in the human heart. "For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies" (Matt. 15:19).

3. Beware of the growth of sin. Once we harbor sin, it leads to worse sin, which affects others. Cain's initial sin leads to worse in his descendants, such as Lamech bragging about his murders. Like the godly line of Seth, we need to call upon the name of the Lord. What sins does this chapter teach us to pray against, and what graces should we seek from the Lord?