

## *The Generations of Cain*

For years when I studied Genesis 4, I was exposed to what seems to be the nearly universal misinterpretation of this passage. That rather grim interpretation holds that the LORD recorded how Cain sinned in murdering his brother Abel, how God cursed him, and how he died. Then, as that interpretation goes on, God spent the last half of the chapter to record a number of generations from one particular line of Cain which ended with a descendant named Lamech and his children. The interpretation holds that since Lamech then also killed a man, it proved that the wicked line of Cain had learned nothing and they were all condemned. Supposedly, this line of Cain was never heard from again, presumably perishing in the flood of Noah. I used to accept this interpretation even though I knew that it was jarringly inconsistent with the message of Genesis 3 which is a message of grace and hope. I accepted it even though I knew it was incompatible with the Bible's great theme of God's persevering grace. Let us take the time and really study the story of the generations of Cain. I will mark the number of the generations with Roman numerals.

Genesis 4:17-24 ***Cain*<sup>I</sup> lay with his wife,<sup>I</sup> and she became pregnant and gave birth to *Enoch*.<sup>II</sup><sup>2</sup> *Cain* was then building a city,<sup>3</sup> and he named it after his son *Enoch*. To *Enoch* was born *Irada*,<sup>III</sup><sup>4</sup> and *Irada* was the father of *Mehujael*,<sup>IV</sup><sup>5</sup> and *Mehujael* was the father of *Methushael*,<sup>V</sup><sup>6</sup> and *Methushael* was the father of *Lamech*.<sup>VI</sup> *Lamech*<sup>7</sup> married two women, one named *Adah*<sup>8</sup> and the other *Zillah*.<sup>9</sup> *Adah* gave birth to *Jabal*;<sup>10</sup> he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was *Jubal*;<sup>11</sup> he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. *Zillah* also had a son, *Tubal-Cain*,<sup>12</sup> who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.<sup>13</sup><sup>14</sup> *Tubal-Cain*'s sister was *Na'amah*.<sup>15</sup> <sup>VII</sup> *Lamech* said to his wives, "Adah**

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, a grown daughter of Adam and Eve.

<sup>2</sup> *Enoch* means "dedicated."

<sup>3</sup> The fact that *Cain* was building a city indicates that he had developed a substantial family by the time of *Enoch*'s birth. We know he was over 130 years old. Cities have walls which provide protection.

<sup>4</sup> *Irada* is derived from the word for "wild ass" and can mean "fleet."

<sup>5</sup> *Mehujael* means "smitten by God."

<sup>6</sup> *Methushael* means "who is of God."

<sup>7</sup> *Lamech* is thought to mean "powerful" although the etymology is uncertain.

<sup>8</sup> *Adah* means "ornament."

<sup>9</sup> *Zillah* means "shade."

<sup>10</sup> *Jabal* means "a stream of water."

<sup>11</sup> *Jubal* means "a river." Perhaps the origin of "jubilee" or which denotes "the sound of the trumpet."

<sup>12</sup> There is no agreement on the meaning of this name but one of meanings given is "brought out of Cain."

**and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me,<sup>16</sup> a young man for injuring me. If Cain <sup>17</sup> is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times.”**

Reading through this passage in the past, I was always troubled by several things. The first thing was that the standard explanation for this entire section on the line of Cain was that it was a cautionary tale on the evil line of Cain. I was troubled by this because I have often noted that God delights in showing that no people are beyond his grace. Korah, who rebelled against Moses is an example.<sup>18</sup> In spite of Korah’s sin, God delighted in the fact that the Sons of Korah wrote eleven of the Psalms and the Prophet Samuel was the seventeenth generation from Korah.

God had expressly forbidden condemning people based on the sins of their relatives in Deuteronomy.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, God expressed his opinion of condemning people for the sins of their fathers in the Book of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 18:1-4 “The word of the LORD came to me: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: “‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? “As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son--both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

Why then would God spend eight verses in Genesis 4 condemning the line of Cain’s children for the sin of their father? Particularly, when we find out in the next chapter that nearly all of the rest of the human race who were alive when the Great Flood came, many of whom were surely descended from Seth, wound up condemned by their own sinful choices. Remember, Adam and Eve had many sons and daughters, all of whom had many sons and daughters on to over well

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<sup>13</sup> *If the families of Lamech and Enoch came together in the marriage of Naamah and Methuselah as I believe, the tool making of Tubal-Cain would have been very useful in the construction of the ark of Noah.*

<sup>14</sup> *Note that none of these descendants of Cain were farmers. That was part of the curse.*

<sup>15</sup> *Naamah and her brothers were the seventh generation from Cain. I believe she married Methuselah the son of Enoch of the line of Seth. Methuselah was the seventh generation out of the line Seth. Her son was named Lamech after her father.*

<sup>16</sup> *Unlike Cain, Lamech had no “mark” to protect him. However, having been forced to kill to protect himself, he reasoned God’s response would be grace.*

<sup>17</sup> *It could well be that Cain was still alive and the head of his family. After all, Adam lived 230 years after the birth of the 8<sup>th</sup> generation through Seth. If so, Cain’s mark or sign was a perpetual testimony of the persevering grace of God.*

<sup>18</sup> *Korah is even compared to Cain in Jude 1.*

<sup>19</sup> *Deuteronomy 24:16 “Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.”*

over ten generations. Of the millions of the descendants of Adam and Eve <sup>20</sup> who must have been alive at the time of the flood, only eight were saved. Why would God focus here on the line of Cain? I concluded it was to show something else.

The second thing that I could never understand was how Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain could be the fathers of any people who “live in tents” and “raise livestock” and “play harps” (note the **present tense** used by the patriarchs to describe these people). After all, by the time of the patriarchs when Genesis was written, the flood had occurred, and only those descended from the male line through Seth had survived. Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain and all their descendants and knowledge were (according to some) supposedly wiped out in the flood by the time Genesis was written down. According to those verses and the present tense used, the descendants of those men were still alive after the flood, so those descendants (through a female line) must have been among the eight souls who survived. That drew my attention to an unusual occurrence in the genealogy of Cain. That was the mention of Lamech’s daughter Na’amah. Na’amah is the only daughter mentioned in all the genealogies in Genesis from Adam to Jacob. That seemed worth noting. Every word in the scriptures is there by God’s express decree.

As I read and reread Genesis 4, I saw something that I had missed. It was something that Cain seemed to have missed as well. That something was that the LORD’s judgment on Cain was gracious, and demonstrated to Cain his persevering love. The LORD did not tell Cain, after he had killed innocent Abel, that the penalty was death, which would have been a just punishment. Instead, he told Cain that his life was more valued than before. His life was protected by a sevenfold penalty. God’s response to Cain’s sin was not to reduce Cain’s value in the LORD’s eyes, but to increase it. I could not help thinking about the parable of the lost sheep.

Mark 15:4-7 “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.

Then as I read down to the story of Lamech with the understanding that the sevenfold protection was God’s grace to Cain, I began to understand the story. Lamech called his wives together to announce something important.

Genesis 4:23-24 “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.’”

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<sup>20</sup> *We will look at how many people might have been alive by the time of the Great Flood in the next lesson.*

The traditional interpretation is that Lamech was arrogantly boasting of his “sin.” Consider this, what Lamech did is not even against the Mosaic Law. It was self-defense.

Exodus 22:2 “If a thief is caught breaking in and is struck so that he dies, the defender is not guilty of bloodshed;”

Second, if the sevenfold protection of Cain was grace, then the seventy-seven-fold protection of Lamech was grace. I was struck by the connection to the passage in Matthew:

Matthew 18:21-22 “Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”

It is interesting that the number seven is identified in the Bible with grace or completion time and time again.

As I read down to the passage of Na’amah the oddity of a woman being mentioned in the Genealogies struck me. Since I had long been aware that the peculiar mention of women in the Genealogy in Matthew is related to the Messianic line I proposed this question. What if Na’amah married back into the Line of Seth? What generation number was she and which generation would she most likely marry into? I counted. Na’amah is the seventh generation (See the count in Genesis 4 above). Again, we see the number seven. If she married the seventh generation of Seth (listed in Genesis 5) she would have married Methuselah. Methuselah’s son was named Lamech. That was still more interesting, since Lamech was the name of Na’amah’s father. To round out the picture, it turned out that Lamech the son of Methuselah who would have completed this union of seventh generations lived to be 777 years old. In Genesis 5:28-29 he also got to make the first confirmation of the Messianic promise to his line since Adam:

Genesis 5:28-29 “When Lamech had lived 182 years, he had a son. He named him Noah <sup>21</sup> and said, ‘He will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the LORD has cursed.’”<sup>22</sup>

The name Na’amah means “pleasant, sweet, beautiful, delightful.” Considering the story began with the rejection of Cain’s offering it is appropriate that it ended with Na’amah whose offering of faith was pleasing to God.

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<sup>21</sup> The word “Noah” means “rest.”

<sup>22</sup> Remember, there was a curse on the ground for both the sons of Adam, and the descendants of Cain.

I believe that the Lord's promise to Cain was God's way of saying to Cain that he was still under grace despite his sin. Cain evidently was never to understand or accept God's grace. His descendant Lamech finally did accept God's grace and he and his house were saved and brought into the family of Enoch. He became the grandfather of the second Lamech and the great-grandfather of Noah. Furthermore, I believe that the families of Lamech and Enoch (Methuselah's father) joined together and the daughters and granddaughters of Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain married into the line of Enoch and brought their family skills and knowledge with them which were taken into the world after the flood by Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth and their four wives. This interpretation brings the passage into perfect harmony with the whole theme of the Word of God, both the written and the Living. The idea that God would devote a half chapter to a line of people that died in their sins doesn't ring true. However, a confirmation of His loving grace is in wonderful harmony, and the more rewarding when you understand it by carefully searching God's word.

Ezekiel 18:23 "Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?"

When I started looking for grace in the passage, the number seven just kept bouncing up. Seven generations, sevenfold protection, seventy-sevenfold protection, 777 years of age. If this is the correct interpretation of this passage, and I believe it is, God purposely kept it obscure. Why? So that we can uncover it and realize anew that God is always a God of grace. To those who want to see God as a hard man who "harvests where he has not sown and gathers where he has not scattered seed" (Matthew 25:24) God will judge them according to their own hearts. But God will richly reward those who love Him as a God who always deals with us in compassion. Jonah knew just what God was like.

Jonah 4:2 "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

I believe Lamech finally saw God's love, and God rewarded him by removing the curse through Na'amah, his daughter.

A few years after I came to the conclusions above, I noticed that the name Cainan, which is listed in the Genealogy of the Lord in Luke 3:36 and in the Septuagint <sup>23</sup> versions of Genesis 10:24 and 11:12 can be translated "of Cain" or "son/descendant of Cain." He was the grandson of Shem, one of the eight survivors of the Great Flood. We know it was in the original text because it is inscribed by the Holy Spirit in Luke. The name seems to have been expunged from later Hebrew texts. I couldn't help wondering if this expunging of a name that indicated descent from Cain was an example of how people do not want to recognize God's persevering grace to sinners like Cain.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Septuagint was the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC translation of the original Hebrew text into Greek.*

