

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE

(Gen. 4:16-24)

1. *The Patriarchal Age*

The story of Cain and Abel introduces the Patriarchal form of government and worship. Family government is the oldest form of social organization known to history; family worship is the oldest form of worship described in the Bible. The patriarch was the head of his family; as such, he acted as prophet, priest and king. As *prophet*, he communicated the will of God, which he received by direct revelation, to his household; as *priest*, he offered sacrifice and acted as mediator between Yahweh and his family; and as *king*, his will was absolute law. The institution of worship during this Dispensation was the altar. This may have been a mound of earth, or a huge stone, or several stones placed one on top of the other, or a heap of unhewn stones and native earth (Exo. 20:24-26, Deut. 27:5-6). The patriarchs were nomadic, of course, and the altar was usually a heap of unhewn stones and native earth thrown together wherever the patriarch pitched his tents and on which he offered sacrifices to Jehovah. The first period of the Patriarchal Dispensation was the Antediluvian Period in the story of which, in the Biblical account, we have the history of the Messianic Genealogy from Adam to Noah.

2. *The Line of Cain*

"16 And Cain went out from the presence of Jehovah, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. 17 And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch; and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. 18 And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mebujael; and Mebujael begat Methusael; and Methusael begat Lamech. 19 And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE 4:16-24

the name of the other Zillah. 20 And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents and have cattle. 21 And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and pipe. 22 And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. 23 And Lamech said unto his wives:

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;

Ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech:

For I have slain a man for wounding me,

And a young man for bruising me:

24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,

Truly Lamech seventy and seven fold."

(1) V. 16. In view of the repeated affirmations in Scripture of God's omnipresence (everywhereness: cf. Psa. 139:7-10, Isa. 66:1, Jer. 23:23-24, Amos 9:2-3, Acts 17:27-28), how can it be said that any human being went "out from" His presence? (Cf. Gen. 3:8, 11:5, 18:20-21; 1 Ki. 19:11-12, Jonah 1:3.) Obviously, the "presence of Jehovah" (Yahweh) in these latter passages had reference either (a) to special and visible manifestations of Deity at the times indicated, or (b) to the place of those manifestations (probably at the entrance of the Garden where the Cherubim were stationed), or (c) to both. All such passages are anthropomorphic in character. It will be noted that Cain became a dweller "in the land of Nod," that is, the land of Wandering, "on the east of Eden." "The name of this unidentified land recalls the description of Cain as a 'wanderer,' *nad*, in the land of Nod" (JB, 19, n.). It may carry a connotation of the man's obvious *restlessness*: was the Biblical Cain a counterpart of the Greek Prometheus? Does this mean, as Josephus conjectures, that Cain was not in any sense reformed by his punishment, "but waxed worse and worse, giving himself to rapine, robbery, oppression, deceit" (Whitelaw, PCG, 82)?

(2) V. 17. (a) *Cain's wife*. "Starting from a single pair in Eden, in the course of seven generations the human family must have attained to very considerable dimensions. At the birth of Seth, Adam was 130 years old, and in all probability had other sons and daughters besides Cain and his wife. If Lamech, the seventh from Adam in the line of Cain, was contemporaneous with Enoch, the seventh from Adam in the line of Seth, at least 600 years had passed away since the race began to multiply; and if Abraham's stock in less than 400 years amounted to 600,000 [men alone, "a mixed multitude," Exo. 12:37-42], Cain's posterity in the like time might arise to the like multitude. If to these the descendants of Seth be added, it will appear that the earth's population in the time of Lamech was considerably over 1,000,000 inhabitants" (PCG, 90). Murphy (MG, 158): "The wife of Cain was of necessity his sister, though this was forbidden in after times, for wise and holy reasons, when the necessity no longer existed." (b) *The first city*. Cain built the city and named it *Enoch* after the name of his son. A city in that day was a stronghold, a fort, built on high ground, and walled.

(3) V. 18. A series of three nondescript characters, progenitors of three successive generations: Irad ("townsman," "wild ass?"), Mehujael ("smitten by God"), Methushael ("strong man of God"?). "And Methushael begat Lamech" ("strong youth"). In this genealogy Lamech stands out in bold relief as a man of authority, aggressiveness, even violence.

(4) *Lamech's Family*, vv. 19-24. (a) V. 19. The first record and evidently the first instance of polygamy. (b) Note the names of the two wives: Adah ("the adorned," "ornament," "beauty"), and Zillah ("shadow," "tinkling," "musical player"). These seem to indicate the charms which attracted Lamech and caused him to turn marriage from a moral into a sensual institution. (c) Vv. 20, 21—Adah's sons were named Jabal (*yabal*, "to lead" flocks),

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE 4:16-24 and Jubal (*yobel*, "trumpet"). (d) V. 25—Zillah's son was Tubal-cain ("hammer blow of the smith"). "Tubal (name of a northern race, Gen. 10:2, famous for its deposits of metal). Cain means 'smith' in other Semitic languages" (JB, 66n.). Murphy (MG, 159): "The three names Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal are formed from a root signifying to *flow, run, go forth*, perhaps *blow*, from which comes the *blast* or trumpet-note of joy or release. Accordingly, all sorts of going forth, that were suitable to the life of a nomad, seem to have distinguished this family." We have here an account of the beginnings of stockbreeding, of the invention and use of musical instruments, and of various forms of metal-working. Some say that we have described here "the three classes of nomads: shepherds, traveling musicians, and tinkers" (JB, 66, n.). (e) Note the name of Tubal-cain's sister, Naamah, meaning "lovely." Does not this indicate that the Cainites selected their wives for their sensual (voluptuous) forms and lovely faces rather than for their pious hearts? Thus we find in comparing the name of Tubal-cain's sister ("the lovely") with that of Adam's wife ("the living") a growing symptom of the degeneracy which was gradually coming upon man, and especially on—and through—the line of Cain.

(5) *The Song of Lamech* (vv. 23-24). "This ferocious song, composed in honour of a desert paladin named Lamech, is recorded here as evidence of the increasing ferocity of Cain's descendants" (JB, 21, n.). Whitelaw (PCG, 89): "In protestations and assurances in which the mind of the speaker views the action as already accomplished, being as good as done . . . then the father of Tubal-cain is depicted as exulting in the weapons which his son's genius had invented, and with boastful arrogance threatening death to the first man that should injure him, impudently asserting that by means of these same weapons he would exact upon his adversary a vengeance ten times greater than that which had been threatened against the

murderer of Cain. Considering the character of the speaker and the spirit of the times, it is probable that this is the correct interpretation." "Lamech's song in Gen. 4: 23f. is frequently thought to be a 'sword-lay' glorifying the weapons of war invented by his son. He boasts to his wives that he has killed men, and, because of his superior strength due to his weapons, he has no need of God's protection, but is well able to defend himself. He appears as 'a cruel man, destitute of all humanity' (Calvin)" (NBD, 706). Murphy (MG, 159, 160): "In this fragment of an ancient song, we have Lamek, under the strong excitement of having slain a man in self-defence, reciting to his wives the deed, and at the same time comforting them and himself with the assurance that if Cain the murderer would be avenged sevenfold, he the manslayer in self-defence would be avenged seventy and seven fold. This short ode has all the characteristics of the most perfect Hebrew poetry. Every pair of lines is a specimen of the Hebrew parallelism or rhythm of sentiment and style. They all belong to the synthetic, synonymous, or cognate parallel; the second member reiterating with emphasis the first. Here we observe that Lamek was a poet; one of his wives was possibly a songstress, and the other had a taste for ornament. One daughter was the lovely, and three sons were the inventors of most of the arts which sustain and embellish life. This completes the picture of this remarkable family." Remarkable, yes, but unfortunately proud, self-assertive, and irreligious. Cornfeld (AtD, 23, 24): "The Song of Lamech or in fact a fragment of the original, is one of the oldest examples of epic style in the Old Testament. Other very ancient epic fragments, artistically moulded, will be found elsewhere and may easily be distinguished by their style and spirit as different from the literary material in which they are embedded." Lange (CDHCG, 261): "The song of Lamech is the first decidedly poetic form in the Scriptures, more distinct than ch.

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE 4:16-24

1:27 and ch. 2:23, as is shown by the marked parallelism of the members. It is the consecration of poetry to the glorification of a Titanic insolence, and, sung as it was in the ears of both his wives, stands as a proof that lust and murder are near akin to each other. Rightly may we suppose . . . that the invention of his son, Tubal Cain, that is, the invention of weapons, made him so excessively haughty, whilst the invention of his son Jubal put him in a position to sing to his wives his song of hate and vengeance. This indicates, at the same time, an immeasurable pride in his talented sons. He promises himself the taking of blood-vengeance, vastly enhanced in degree, but shows, at the same time, by the citation of the case of his ancestor Cain, that the dark history of that bad man had become transformed into a proud remembrance for his race." (Could the Battle of the Gods and Giants (Titans) in Greek tradition rightly be regarded as an echo of this Song of Lamech? See Plato's *Sophist*.)

3. *The Degeneracy of the Cainites*

The brief account of Cain's posterity which is given us in this section of the fourth chapter of Genesis (vv. 16-24) shows clearly the kind of people they were. It is evident that they inherited the corrupt, restless character of their common ancestor. Thus, in a few striking statements the inspired writer pictures the retrogression of the human race into wickedness and violence, beginning with the Cainites, and the subsequent intermingling of the two lines of Cain and Seth. It was this intermingling, moreover, that resulted in the universal wickedness which precipitated Divine Judgment in the form of the Flood. The degeneracy of the Cainites is evidenced: (1) *By their names.* Enoch ("the initiated and his city"), Irad, Mehujael, and Lamech, are all names that suggest this-worldliness: even Methushael is a name which indicates this tendency, although there is some confusion as to what this name really

did mean. Adah, Zillah, and Naamah, are names that indicate sensual attraction rather than true nobility of womanhood. (2) *By their works*. The building of a city was unnecessary and productive of sin. Urbanization has always multiplied sin, crime, disease, insanity, intoxication, prostitution, strife, violence, indeed every kind of wickedness (cf. Gen. 1:28, 11:4). There is no evidence that God ever looks with favor on the concentration of population. "And though it certainly cannot be sinful to handle a harp, or to cultivate poetry, yet when we put all of these things together—beautiful wives, iron weapons, musical instruments, warlike ballads, if not bacchanalian songs—it is not difficult to perceive a deepening devotion to the things of life which invariably proclaims a departure from the things of God." Of course this does not mean necessarily that the facets of human culture which take in what we ordinarily speak of as the useful arts and the fine arts are evil *in themselves*: they become evil, however, when they are prostituted to profane, licentious and violent ends, when they become the means used by man to glorify, even to deify, himself and his kind. History certainly testifies that so many persons who devote their lives to the production of the fine arts especially (music, poetry and other forms of literature, painting, sculpture, etc.) are notoriously lacking in religious (spiritual) sensitivity or practice. *Why is this so?* (3) *By their immoral lives*. We see, in the profane careers of the Cainites a growing disregard for divine things, and this profanity seems to gather momentum with each succeeding generation. Lamech prostituted the institution of marriage into a sensual and polygamous relationship. We see the growth of a turbulent and lawless spirit, in the warlike weapons of Tubal-cain's invention and in the boastful ballad which Lamech "sang" to his wives. These two things—licentiousness and lawlessness—are always indicative of moral and spiritual degeneracy.

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE 4:16-24

4. *The Antiquity of Human Culture*

In sociological jargon, culture is usually defined as the sum total of "behavior patterns" handed down from generation to generation. It includes the various facets of what are commonly called the *fine arts* and the *useful arts*. In the section of chapter 4 now before us we find brief references to the progenitors of certain cultural pursuits, namely, those of herdsmen, musicians, and smiths (metalworkers). Some interesting comments on this development are to be found in works by modern writers. For example, Skinner writes (ICCG, 123): "The three sons of Lamech represent not the highest stages of social evolution, but three picturesque modes of life, which strike the peasant as interesting and ornamental, but by no means essential to the framework of society." But—by what authority do we assume that the author of this account was writing for peasants in particular? Simpson (IB, 524): "It may be noted here that the implication of vss. 20-22a is that Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal (-cain) were the fathers of the nomads, musicians, and metalworkers existing at the time of writing, i.e., that the author of this account of the origins of civilization knew nothing of the Flood." This is a purely arbitrary assumption, and is completely out of harmony with the obvious design of the text which surely is to point up the growing worldliness of the Cainites and so to lead to an explanation of the universal wickedness which brought Divine judgment on the antediluvian world. Again, it has been supposed by the analytical critics that these cultural developments as depicted in Gen. 4:16-24, not the least of which by any means was the building of a city, occurred much later than in antediluvian times, and hence that the narrative presents an anachronism which can be resolved only by assuming that it was composed at a much later date, probably after the beginning of the Iron Age about 1500 B.C. To this argument we reply that the inspired writer—whom we believe to have been Moses,

although he might well have been making use of ancient traditions—is not picturing contemporary events, that is, events occurring in his own lifetime, but is simply referring back to the particular age in which these cultural developments occurred, and to those individuals who originated the phases of culture which are specifically mentioned. Moreover, the fundamental purpose of the writer is obvious (as stated above), namely, *to chronicle the growing degeneracy of the Cainites, their sheer worldliness and irreligiousness*, rather than to emphasize the historical or sociological content of what he is putting in the record. It is not surprising, therefore, that he makes no attempt to trace the Line of Cain beyond seven generations. Since he is interested only in accounting for the universal wickedness which later overtook the human race, in the intermingling of the more pious Sethites with the worldly Cainites, his purpose is accomplished fully in his description of the profane character of Lamech and his wives and offspring.

The notion of anachronism in these verses before us has been thoroughly debunked by archaeology. It is clearly understood in our day, as proved by archaeological discoveries, that many aspects of human culture are very ancient. In the Neolithic Age, which extended roughly from about 8000 B.C. to 5000 B.C., plant and animal domestication was fully developed and even pottery began to appear about the latter date. (Indeed we must take account even of the polychrome paintings on the cave walls, of the hand-carved artifacts (such as batons especially, probably used for magical purposes), many specimens of which have been brought to light by archaeological excavations, and which must have been in existence about the beginning of the Neolithic Period.) The Chalcolithic Age (c. 5000-3000 B.C.) was marked by many cultural advances. For example, Albright tells us (FSAC, 173, 174) that the decorative art of the Chalcolithic Age is “very instructive” as

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE 4:16-24

compared with that which preceded it. He writes: "In the chalcolithic cultures of Halaf, Susa, and Ghassul after 4000 B.C. we find an extraordinary development of the imaginative-aesthetic powers of man, resulting in astonishingly complex geometrical figures of dragons which carry us into the realm of phantasmagoria. It is very doubtful whether man's artistic capabilities are actually any higher today than they were in late prehistoric times, though the number of motifs, techniques, and media available to him now is, of course, immeasurably greater." Nelson Glueck (RD, 42-50) tells us that advanced copper industry was developed in some areas of Palestine as early as the beginning of the Chalcolithic Age. "It is written that the cousins of the Kenites, called the Kennizites, lived in the Valley of the Smiths (the Wadi Arabah), and, furthermore, that Tubal-cain, the latter part of whose name is just a different English spelling for Kenite, was the first forger of copper and iron instruments (1 Chronicles 4:12-14, Gen. 4:22). . . . I am inclined to think that there is a link of hereditary and industrial union, which binds the Kenite and Judaeen miners and craftsmen of the Wadi Arabah with their very distant Chalcolithic predecessors at Tell Abu Matar, even as its primitive copper crucibles, unchanged in style throughout the centuries, may have served as models for those in Solomon's intricate smelter at Ezion-geber" (p. 45, cf. Num. 21:8-9). Again (*ibid.*, 58): "The Chalcolithic farming communities in the Northern Negev belonged to an advanced agricultural civilization, which extended throughout the Fertile Crescent." Again (p. 48): "Tell Abu Matar was not a mean village lacking in comfort and culture. Among its residents were farmers, shepherds, potters, weavers, smiths and other artisans of high attainments. They stored their grain in pits made moistureproof with plaster linings. The furniture of their households and the tools of their trades were fashioned out of flint, basalt, limestone, ivory and bone. Distinctive

pottery was shaped by hand with partial or occasional use of the tournette, and fired so well in kilns that some of it has survived the passage of six millenia. Men and women adorned themselves with stone and ivory bracelets, copper rings, pendants of mother of pearl and amulets sometimes of striking beauty," etc. He concludes: "In many respects, the Chalcolithic civilization of Tell Abu Matar was indistinguishable from that of sites of the same period elsewhere. It obviously did not exist in a vacuum." Remember that these statements describe cultures that flourished at the very beginning of the Chalcolithic Age, about 4000 B.C., and probably earlier. ("Chalcolithic" means literally "copperstone." Bronze (brass), which came in later, was an alloy of copper and tin.) Finally, in this connection, Cornfeld (AtD, 23): "Whether the Cainite civilization referred to in Genesis 4 originated in Anatolia, in Kurdistan, or farther east of Eden, or how it spread, is uncertain. The Biblical representation of the progress of the arts and crafts is well borne out by archaeology. The potter's wheel, the use of donkeys, primitive wheeled vehicles, bricks and cylinder seals are among man's discoveries in these earliest prehistoric sites." There can be no doubt that the phases of human culture described in Genesis 4: 16-24 flourished not too long after the very beginnings of the history of *homo sapiens*. Indeed archaeology has, in recent years, confirmed the historicity of practically every event recorded in Scripture.

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REVIEW QUESTIONS ON PART EIGHTEEN

1. With what events did the Patriarchal Dispensation begin and end?
2. What was the earliest form of government? Of worship?
3. What was the duty of the patriarch as prophet, as priest, and as king?

THE BEGINNINGS OF HUMAN CULTURE 4:16-24

4. What is the correlation between this threefold function and the meaning of the titles, Messiah, Christos, and Christ?
5. Of what did the patriarch's household consist?
6. What was the altar throughout the Patriarchal Dispensation? Of what was it constructed?
7. What was the nature of the sacrifice offered in the Patriarchal Dispensation?
8. What is the first period of the Patriarchal Dispensation called, and why?
9. What genealogical line is given us in Genesis 4:16-24?
10. In what sense did Cain go "out from the presence of Jehovah"?
11. What is probably indicated by the phrase, "the land of Nod"?
12. Summarize the suggestions offered in regard to Cain's wife.
13. Who built the first city and what was it named?
14. What was the moral significance of this act?
15. What evils usually result from concentration of population?
16. What was God's original injunction to man *in re* the occupancy of the earth? Instead of obeying this command, what did man do?
17. Is there any evidence in Scripture that God looks with favor on concentration of population?
18. List the descendants in the Line of Cain terminating with Lamech.
19. What is suggested by the meaning of the names given these men?
20. Who is represented as introducing polygamy?
21. Who were Lamech's wives, and what is the meaning of their names?

22. What facets of human culture were introduced by Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-cain, respectively?
23. What was the name of Tubalcain's sister and what did it mean?
24. What is meant by the Song of Lamech?
25. What was the character of this song from the *literary* and from the *moral* points of view?
26. What does it reveal about the person who composed and sang it?
27. On what grounds can we say that Cain's evil propensities were handed down to his offspring?
28. What were the phases of human culture originated by the sons of Lamech?
29. What is meant by the term "culture," and of what does culture consist?
30. What are the evidences of the growing degeneracy of the Cainites?
31. Show how this presentation of the development of culture harmonizes with the actual cultural developments in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic Ages.
32. What, obviously, was the author's purpose in inserting this brief account in the Scripture record of the origins of these facets of culture?
33. Why, probably, did he stop tracing the Line of Cain after seven generations?
34. What is the obvious relation of Gen. 4:16-24 to the material that is presented in succeeding chapters?
35. Explain what is meant by the Chalcolithic Age and the Bronze Age. What is bronze (in Scripture, brass)?