

Cain, Culture and Corruption

Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. ¹⁷ And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech. ¹⁹ Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. ²⁰ And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. ²² And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah. ²³ Then Lamech said to his wives: "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. ²⁴ If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold." ²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed." ²⁶ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then *men* began to call on the name of the LORD. (Genesis 4:16–26)

There's a line from a 1933 German play, in which one of the characters famously says, "Whenever I hear the word culture, I reach for my revolver." For many people that is their reaction to the word culture. It sounds pretentious, or elitist, or a bit too theoretical or intellectual, for many tastes. But in fact, the idea of culture, the real meaning of culture is so closely connected to the meaning of being human, that it is hard to understand one without the other. And the Bible, since it defines what it is to be human, is also going to define what culture really is.

Genesis is the book of beginnings. It gives us the beginning of the cosmos itself, where all created things came into being. It gives us the beginning of humanity, and our home, the earth. It gives us the beginning of male and female, of marriage and childbearing. It gives us the beginning of the Fall, of the entrance of evil and sin. It gives us the beginning, as we saw last time, of false religion, and false worship.

It also gives us the origins of human culture and society. Humans, for the most part, cannot live in total solitude. The world is too big, and we are individually too small, to live without cooperation and dependence on others. We have to live in communities. We gather in groups, and make formal or informal agreements to live in peace, to be bound by certain laws, to help each other find food and shelter. When people do this, they become tribes, or clans. Larger collections of tribes gather and become kingdoms, or fiefdoms. Collections of these become nations. Collections of nations become empires.

The smallest kind of social organisation is often very rudimentary, just hunting and gathering. The most sophisticated is a large-scale civilisation with beautiful art, advanced technology and machinery, highly developed laws, politics, and economics.

Yet all of this has a massive shaping effect on individual humans. The way we see the world, the way we interpret reality, our whole outlook is very much given to us by the culture we grow up in. We are handed ways of life, ways of thinking, ways of acting, we don't sit in a room and come up with them on our own. But what if the way of life, the way of thinking of our surrounding culture has been profoundly wrong?

In many ways, it is just that situation that we find in Genesis 4, leading into chapters 5 and 6 with the Flood. The pre-Flood society was largely a corrupt culture. Those that held to truth and righteousness were apparently a small minority. The society eventually became so corrupt, so tortuously self-destructive, that it was destroyed in a Global Flood.

Very little information is given to us about this period. When you think about it, Genesis 12-50, cover the life of Abraham till the death of Joseph, roughly around 350 years. That's 38 chapters for 350 years. Genesis 1 through 11 gives us the whole history of the world from Adam to Noah, at least 1600 years, and possibly more, in just 11 chapters. The first 11 chapters are played at 5 times the speed of the rest of Genesis. The goal of these chapters is to give us a broad explanation of beginnings to get us to Abraham, and the beginning of the messianic nation, Israel.

But as swift as it is, we do learn enough about this time period to learn about how human culture develops in good and evil ways.

Now Genesis 4 is in the Bible to teach us some very important truth about culture, and how it shapes us. We might think of ourselves as very independent, but we are profoundly social creatures, deeply affected by our culture. To understand what culture is is vital for your spiritual life. It helps you understand belief systems, why people act the way they do, why people believe what they do. It helps you recognise what is shaping you. It helps you see the same kind of thing at work on smaller scales – in your own family, in your church. It helps us understand, partly, why the Bible tells us not to be conformed to the world.

Culture follows a certain pattern, and a certain progress. We see this for the first time, and in very clear form as Cain is expelled from living among Adam and Eve, and heads out and establishes a society in his own image. The culture of Cain develops in three phases as we see in this text.

I. Settlement

Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. ¹⁷ And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech.

Cain heads away from where Adam and Eve had lived, which was likely still close to the now-sealed off Garden of Eden. The word Nod means wanderer or wandering, so it may be a place name, or just referring to his state, nomadic, a fugitive. But eventually, Cain decides to put a stake in the ground and no longer wander. He now has a family, and wants stability. So when his son is born, he establishes a city, and calls the city Enoch.

This is the first city the Bible ever mentions. Obviously, Cain did not singlehandedly build a city, nor did he build a whole city for his family of three. There were many other people around, which also explains, once again, where Cain got his wife. As we have already seen, Adam and Eve had sons and daughters, according to Genesis 5:4. Initially, there there was no prohibition against marrying one's sister, because the human gene pool was so small. So the daughters of Adam and Eve would have married the sons.

If you take into account the extreme long life that existed at this time, low infant mortality, high birth rate, you can have a sizeable population quite quickly that grows exponentially. Henry Morris estimated that after 800 years you could easily have a population of 120 000. By the time of the Flood, he suggests the earth's population could have been as high as seven billion.

So what Cain does is act as a leader, the tribal chieftain who rallies people to himself, and calls them to live cooperatively in a city. The city is named Enoch, but this Enoch is not to be confused with the Enoch who will be descended from Seth, who lives several hundred years later, and is raptured before death. The first human city is the city of Enoch.

Every culture is a group of people dwelling together geographically. They settle down in one place. Unless people dwell together, speak the same language, and develop the same customs, you don't really have a culture. Later on, we'll see the reason God confused the languages at Babel was because sinful mankind wanted to create one settlement, with one language, one culture, that was idolatrous and sinful. By scattering man, causing people to live in different places, it slowed down the progress of rebellion and idolatry. Paul told the Athenians just this: "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, ²⁷ so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (Acts 17:26–27)

Location will even affect how each culture develops. People in the jungle will develop different habits, food, rituals, ceremonies from people living in Arctic locations. Technologies develop to deal with the environment, and these in turn, change the culture.

So, we now see within this settled city, the population grows. The Bible only tells us about Cain's descendants, and it does not tell us how long they lived. Cain's son is Enoch. Enoch's son is Irad. Irad's son is Mehujael. Mehujael's son is Methushael, and Methushael's son is Lamech. Lamech is now six generations down from Adam. We don't know how long each of them lived; if they were more or less similar in ages to the genealogy of chapter 5, then Lamech is about 500 to 600 years after Cain, likely a fairly substantial population.

Now once you have settlement, you can then move to the second phase.

II. Development

¹⁹ Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. ²⁰ And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. ²¹ His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. ²² And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Naamah.

Lamech takes two wives, Adah and Zillah, and the children they bear begin to specialise in areas of human development.

Jabal develops animal husbandry, and domesticated livestock. We don't know if this was just for clothing, or if this was a violation of the command to only eat plants at this time. After the Flood, restrictions on eating meat are lifted. Controlling food supply, and the supply of leather and wool and fur takes a culture from being mere hunter-gatherers to being able to advance and develop further.

His brother Jubal shows how settled the city of Enoch had become. He developed this culture in the area of music and aesthetics. Only once the urgent needs of food and shelter are taken care of, can man turn to the pursuits of beauty, of imagination, of entertainment. It isn't stated, but this very likely means that the society had a writing system, where some kind of poetry and other types of records were being kept.

Their half-brother Tubal-Cain becomes the great pioneer and perfecter of metallurgy. Being able to mine, refine, and pour metals means that the society can construct advanced tools and weapons. More and more labour can be done quickly, or by animals, or with more efficiency. That saved time

means the society can keep building on its progress, advancing from each level of tool to the next. This also shows the fallacy of the evolutionary timelines which has man advancing from Stone Age to Bronze Age to Iron Age. Here this pre-Flood culture was working with bronze and iron long before the time the evolutionists say mankind did.

Now is this development a bad thing? Not at all. Man developing life to where he is not at the mercy of the elements, not living a hand-to-mouth subsistence kind of existence is a good thing. Culture takes the settled nature of life and keeps building upon it, so that human life is further and further away from a mere animal existence.

Now we call this process the common grace of God. The Bible speaks about God being gracious to all men, making some gifts commonly available to all: common grace. For example, 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.” (Matthew 5:45) In other words, God does not reserve His goodness only for His children. He makes life possible and even pleasurable for all people.

Common grace includes God allowing human cultures to develop. He lets them discover natural resources, and invent ways to harness them for a more humane life. He gives mankind enough stability to have food, shelter, families, friendships, wealth, health, and even art and music.

We should be thankful that God has given to unbelieving cultures, such as the ones we grew up in, enough space and grace to develop. This kind of development restrains sin, because it holds in check violence and theft. An orderly society restrains anarchy and lawlessness. At least outwardly, humane societies begin to resemble God's Law more than societies that are disorderly. God's common grace both blesses and limits man, allowing development that can help people to see God more clearly than if they were in a savage condition, scrounging in the dirt for their next meal.

So every culture in the world, and every culture that has ever existed will have had some virtues, some grasp of truth, some ability to reflect the glory of God. Common grace means that there is no culture in the world that has not been reminded, in some way, that they bear the image of God, and owe Him their gratitude.

The problem is that cultures tend to suppress the truth and take what reflects God and point it to their idols.

III. Debasement

²³ Then Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. ²⁴ If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

Lamech appears to be the man singled out to represent what this culture was like.

Here we see what culture does without special grace. In the first place, we saw Lamech violated the command of Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Monogamy, one man and one woman, was God's plan. Lamech strikes at the very heart of culture: the family, and perverts it with polygamy.

The second thing he does is murder and then boast. He tells his two wives that someone wounded him, and he took revenge by murdering him. He even puts his boast in the form of a poem, in the parallel lines that make up Hebrew poetry. The warning that God gave against anyone harming

Cain, is now twisted and inflated into an swaggering brag that he is more than ten times more important and powerful. By telling his wives, there is a hint here that there may have been actual, attempted or suspected adultery with his wives, and he took revenge on them.

Whatever the case, look at what we have. Already, the culture is becoming corrupt sexually. The culture has murder and violence, with apparently no law, and no retribution on Lamech. Society is lapsing into blood-feuds, vengeance, vigilanteism.

Now this gets at the real heart of a culture. A culture is not only a people settled in one place, who begin developing and cultivating human life. A culture is at its deepest root, a shared religion. A culture is a religion fleshed out, a religion externalised, a religion practiced and turned into a system of customs and social norms, and laws, and art forms.

What was Lamech's religion? What was the religion of the city of Enoch? It was not the worship of the one true and living God.

Here is the sad cycle of mankind. Mankind is chastened by God for sin. They then, by the common grace of God, people get to settle and stabilise. But once they stabilise and prosperity begins returning, man turns again to idolatry.

I think it is exactly this period of time that Paul has in mind in Romans 1 when he describes mankind's debasement.

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, ¹⁹ because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown *it* to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world His invisible *attributes* are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, ²¹ because, although they knew God, they did not glorify *Him* as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Professing to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things. ²⁴ Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

Man had ample witness of God, but turned to idolatrous systems of religion. And once the religion was changed, then the entire moral character of the society changed.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature. ²⁷ Likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust for one another, men with men committing what is shameful, and receiving in themselves the penalty of their error which was due. ²⁸ And even as they did not like to retain God in *their* knowledge, God gave them over to a debased mind, to do those things which are not fitting; ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, evil-mindedness; *they are* whisperers, ³⁰ backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, ³¹ undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful; ³² who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them. (Romans 1:18–32)

Humans have all rejected the Creator. Since culture incarnates a religion, some of humanity's idolatry is expressed in every culture. This is not to suggest that all cultures will manifest an identical degree of debauchery. Just as individual humans can sink to greater or lesser depths of wickedness, so can cultures. All cultures contain some expression of depravity, but some cultures give themselves to its celebration. We can say that Aztec culture, which involved continual human sacrifice was one of the worst cultures that have ever existed. We can say that Hebrew culture in the time of Solomon or Hezekiah was one of the best cultures that ever existed. We can judge the

culture by its religion, and how it fleshed that out in its behaviour.

Such was the debasement of the culture of Cain, that it eventually came to a moment where the world needed to be entirely washed of this culture. Chapter 6 describes how this culture had become irredeemable, and the Flood was the result.

Debasement is part of the sad trajectory of cultures without God. Paul describes the culture of the last days.

¹ But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: ² For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, ³ unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, ⁴ traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! (2 Timothy 3:1–5)

The book of Revelation describes the culture during the Tribulation.

²⁰ But the rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, that they should not worship demons, and idols of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk. ²¹ And they did not repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts. (Revelation 9:20–21)

God will never again Flood the world with water, but He will plague the world for its idolatries and debased culture.

But always, within debased cultures, God sends light to those who will see. Chapter 4 ends on a note of hope:

²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.” ²⁶ And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then *men* began to call on the name of the LORD. (Genesis 4:25–26)

God reserved for Himself a remnant who would preserve the truth, and preach it to the corrupt culture of Cain. Till the day of the Flood, the culture of Cain had preachers of righteousness declaring the true and living God, and calling on them to repent.

Genesis 4 teaches us to be thankful that God in His common grace allows humans to become settled and to develop. We can be thankful for society and for culture.

But it also teaches us to be cautious of culture. We are profoundly influenced by culture, and when culture is debased, that is a terrible thing. All we like sheep go astray. We follow the broad way that leads to destruction. We should not simply accept everything culture does. We should examine everything in culture for what it means: what does it flesh out, and incarnate? What belief system? What religion? What faith is behind what our culture does?

Because where we need to, we may have to be like the good Enoch who preached, like Noah who was a preacher of righteousness, standing against a culture which normalises sin and corruption.