

The Book of Beginnings – Studies in Genesis

LESSON XXV : GENESIS 4: 17-22 – FOURTH PARAGRAPH: THE DESCENDANTS OF CAIN
GENESIS 4:23, 24 – FIFTH PARAGRAPH: LAMECH'S SONG

“As we have seen repeatedly, one of the primary themes of the book of Genesis is the unfolding of the promise of Genesis 3:15. That prophecy has already begun to be fulfilled with the slaying of the righteous Abel by the ungodly Cain. The author of Genesis now demonstrates the continuing struggle between the two lines by tracing the genealogical descent of Cain and Seth.” [Currid, 1:152]

“What became of the person who rebelled against God and left the land of blessing in angry defiance of the laws and the sacrifices? He prospered! His line took the lead in producing cities, music, weapons, agricultural implements – in short, civilization. Such activity may have been their way to cope with life under the curse; it was their only recourse in a bitter life. Being separated from God, Cain’s line enhanced their life with these refinements. The righteous descendants of Adam do not figure in this discussion. No doubt they used the culture, as the later Israelites did, to the glory of God; but the text stresses something else as the predominate theme of their life, for which they would be remembered. Seth, the replacement of Abel, fathered Enosh, and then people began to worship the Lord. As great as all the inventions of civilization were, this step was greater by far.” [Ross, 164; the bold red and explanation mark mine] ***If our minds are not blown away in wide-eyed amazement of our God, we are dull indeed!***

Fourth Paragraph – The Descendants of Cain:

‘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.’ (Gen 4:17-22 NKJV)

Rabbi Cassuto’s translation:

***v. 17 – Cain knew / his wife,
and she conceived / and bore Enoch,
who became a city-builder; / and he called the name of the city
after the name of his son, / Enoch.
v. 18 – To Enoch was born / Irad;
and Irad / was the father of Mehujael,
and Mehujael / the father of Methushael,
and Methushael / the father of Lamech.
v. 19 – And Lamech took unto him / two wives;
the name of the one was Adah, / and the name of the other Zillah.***

v. 20 – Adah bore / Jabal;

he was / the father of those who dwell in tents and have cattle.

v. 21 – His brother's name / was Jubal;

he was / the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.

v. 22 – Zillah, she also / bore Tubal-cain,

the instructor / of every worker in bronze and iron.

The sister of Tubal-cain / was Naamah.

THE GRACE OF GOD EVEN IN JUDGMENT — The previous section ended with Cain fearing he would be killed for the murder of his brother, followed by God's reassurance that no one would avenge Abel's death. ***While Cain's genealogy succeeds in demonstrating how sin disqualified Cain's household as the lineage of blessing, it also shows conversely that God's promise of preservation for Cain was honored and his line was even blessed materially.***

"Another evidence of God's grace may well be the advancements that the Cainite family achieve in the development of three aspects of civilization: animal breeding, music, and metallurgy. Even these elements of human experience, while truly mortal, owe themselves ultimately to Israel's God, who enables human life to discover and 'rule' the earth (1:28)." [Mathews, 1:280] "A biased account would have ascribed nothing good to Cain. The truth is more complex: God was to make much use of Cainite techniques for His people, from the semi-nomadic discipline itself (20; cf. Heb. 11:9) to the civilized arts and crafts (e.g., Ex 35:35). ***The phrase 'he was the father of all such' acknowledges the debt and prepares us to accept for ourselves a similar indebtedness to secular enterprise; for the Bible nowhere teaches that the godly should have all the gifts.*** At the same time we are saved from over-valuing these skills: the family of Lamech could handle its environment but not itself. The attempt to improve on God's marriage ordinance (19; cf. 2:24) set a disastrous precedent, on which the rest of Genesis is comment enough; and the immediate conversion of metal-working to weapon-making is equally ominous. ***Cain's family is a microcosm: its pattern of technical prowess and moral failure is that of humanity.... The ensuing account gives a first taste of a self-sufficient society, which is the essence of what the New Testament calls 'the world.'***" [Kidner, 77f]

GENESIS RECORDS THE UNFAVORED SONS BEFORE THE ELECT LINE — Genesis always records the descendants of the unfavored sons before the elect line (the unfavored line is what we know as the outworking of Satan's seed as prophesied in Gen 3:15). The genealogies of Japheth and Ham precede that of Shem (chap. 10); Ishmael's genealogy precedes Isaac's (25:12-34); and Esau's, Jacob's (chaps. 36, 37). So here the genealogy of Cain precedes Seth's (4:17-5:32). ***"After completing the genealogy of the sons of Cain, who are not to appear again in the rest of the book, nor even to exist in the world, Scripture proceeds to give a detailed account of the descendants of Seth, the ancestor of all those who will henceforth be mentioned in the book and of all postdiluvian humanity throughout the generations."*** [Cassuto, 1:244]

THE GENEALOGY OF THE CAINITES — "Beginning with Cain, the lineage consists of ten members (including Naamah) and seven generations (vv. 17-18). It is *linear* in construction, where one descendant alone is named to represent each successive generation. The lineage concludes with the offspring of Lamech, whose four children are presented in a *segmented* form of genealogy (vv. 19-22). Segmented genealogies include more than one descendant and create a family 'tree' by branching." [Mathews, 1:280]

Note both genealogies conclude with a segmented branch that give three sons. In the case of Cain's lineage the segmented branch includes a daughter's name by Lamech, 'Naamah.'

CAINITES (4:17-24)

Adam (v. 1)
Cain
Enoch
Irada
Mehujael
Methushael
Lamech
Jabal – Jubal – Tubal-cain – (Naamah)

SETHITES (5:3-32)

Adam
Seth
Enosh
Kenan
Mahalial
Jared
Enoch
Methuselah
Lamech
Noah
Shem – Ham – Japeth

Cain and Seth's lines have identical names twice: 'Enoch' and 'Lamech' (5:18, 25). 'Cain / Kenan,' 'Mehalalel / Mehujael,' 'Irada / Jared,' and 'Methushael / Methuselah' are similar; other resemblances are more apparent in English than the Hebrew. ***“The identity and similarity of names can prove nothing more than that the two branches of the human race did not keep entirely apart from each other; a fact established by their subsequently intermarrying.”*** [Keil, 1:117]

THE NUMBER 'SEVEN' IN GENEALOGIES — Mathews quotes J. Sasson [*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, supplementary volume, 354-356; 'A Genealogical Convention in Biblical Chronology?', *Journal for Old Testament Studies* (German), 90 (1978): 171-185] who shows, "joining the longstanding tradition of the rabbis, the propensity of the biblical genealogies to give priority to those names whose position occurs as seventh or a multiple of seven." [Mathews, 1:282] ***Lamech is the epitome of Cain's corrupt family: proud, arrogant, hardened, depraved. As the seventh name in the genealogy, the number for completeness, Lamech's notorious career attests to the wicked life of the Cainites. In contrast to the wicked Lamech of Cain's line, the seventh from Adam through Seth was Enoch. He was quite possibly a contemporary with evil Lamech but Enoch walked with God and did not die (Gen 5:24).***

TWO RECORDED SPEECHES IN THESE GENEALOGIES — In the two genealogies (chaps. 4 & 5), speeches are attributed to only two of the people listed, both named Lamech. Lamech the descendant of Cain sang a taunt song of his prowess in killing, but Lamech the descendant of Seth names Noah in the hope that he would bring people comfort from the pain of the curse.

v. 17 – Cain knew his wife, — The opening phrase suggests Cain was already married at this time. The question as to where Cain got his wife is obviously that he married either one of his sisters or cousins. This explanation is given by all the commentators from Talmudic times to our own day. Note there were many of the populous that are never mentioned in the Scriptures: 'After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters.' (Gen 5:4) Another example of this solution would have been after the Flood wherein there were only eight people on the earth. To rebuild the population, brothers and sisters would have to marry until there was enough people that this would not be necessary. Note Abraham also married his half-

sister (Gen 20:2, 12), Isaac married Rebekah the daughter of his cousin Bethuel (Gen 24:15, 67), and Jacob married his cousins Leah and Rachel.

THE RECORD OF TRADITIONS — Of interest but of no authority are some of the traditions passed along by the Jews. “The question where Cain got his wife is duly answered in Jub. 4:1, 9: she was his sister, and her name was ‘Âwân .” [Skinner, 116] “*And in the third week in the second jubilee she gave birth to Cain, and in the fourth she gave birth to Abel, and in the fifth she gave birth to her daughter ’Âwân And Cain took ’Âwân his sister to be his wife and she bare him Enoch at the close of the fourth jubilee.*” [The Apocryphal Book of Jubilees, 4:1, 9]

‘BUT THE BIBLE FORBIDS MARRIAGE BETWEEN CLOSE RELATIONS’ — It does, but the laws against marrying family members were initially given as part of the Mosaic covenant approximately 2,500 years after creation. Due in part to what we now know to be genetic defects, these laws were necessary to help protect the offspring from mutations shared by both parents. Those genetic defects would not have been in existence in the very beginning. [Ham, 149f]

and she conceived and bore Enoch, — **Enoch**, Hebrew, *chanôkh* ; his name is associated with the idea of ‘*dedication.*’ Wenham and Mathews say his name is probably related to ‘*train up, dedicate*’ or ‘*introduce, initiate.*’ This name occurs three other times in the book of Genesis: one descended from Seth (Gen 5:18-24); one of the sons of Midian, the son of Abraham (Gen 25:4); and the firstborn of Reuben, son of Jacob (Gen 46:9).

who became a city-builder; – CITY — Hebrew, *’îr* ; a term that can be applied to any human settlement, more-or-less permanently inhabited, small or great, protected by the erection of a ‘*fortress*’ or simple wall in contradistinction to the isolated tents of shepherds. “Cities, with their community of interrelated activities and interests, technology, animal husbandry, music, poetry, and so forth – most of these things can legitimately be regarded as a proper response to God’s primeval command to subdue the earth and exercise dominion over it, provided they are regarded in this light, with man as God’s steward of them for the benefit of his fellow man and for the glory of God. Unfortunately, man’s history indicates, rather, that he has cultivated them primarily in rebellion against God; and this was especially true of the antediluvian civilization.” [Morris, 147]

‘BUILT’ OR ‘WAS BUILDING’? — Most of our English translations render this something as the NKJV, ‘*And he built a city.*’ Several however including Keil states, “That the words *rayêhî bōneh* , ‘*he was building,*’ merely indicates that commencement and progress of the building, but not its termination.” [Keil, 1:116f] Some translations therefore render this as ‘*Cain was building a city*’ (NET) or ‘*Cain was then building a city* (NIV; see also Christian Standard Bible, Contemporary English Version, Easy English Bible, Expanded Bible, God’s Word Translation, International Children’s Bible, Names of God Bible, New Century Version, New International Reader’s Version, Tree of Life Version, Young’s Literal Translation). Rabbi Cassuto agrees (and he also believes the city builder was Enoch and not Cain; see below), saying the text is literally, ‘*and he was building a city,*’ [rendered: ‘*and he became a city-builder*’] and not, ‘*and he built a city.*’ The sense would therefore be not that he built a city, singular; but rather that he was a builder of cities, an occupation over a long period of time. [Cassuto, 1:230] Henry Morris agrees, writing “Whatever his intent, the Hebrew verb is indefinite – ‘*was building*’ – probably suggesting that, though he may have started it, he did not finish it. He moved on after a little while, perhaps leaving his son Enoch, after whom the city was named, to complete the job and to begin the true Cainite civilization.” [Morris, 144f]

WHO WAS THE ‘CITY BUILDER?’ — The vast majority of those commenting on this verse states the city was built by Cain and was named after his son Enoch; e.g., ‘*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.’ (NKJV; note that of the 57 different translations listed on Bible Gateway, all without exception had a similar translation). It should be noted however not all agree with that rendering; e.g., Rabbi Cassuto argues the city builder was not Cain but Enoch with the city being named after Enoch’s son, Irad:

“Hence, just as in the earlier sentence the subject of the verb *vayehi* [literally, ‘and was’] is the son that was born, so in our verse, too, this is the case. Our text refers not to Cain but to his son, Enoch.” [Cassuto, 1:229f] The Rabbi says this is similar to the form in 4:2, ‘*And again, she bore his brother Abel, Now* [literally, ‘and’] *Abel was a keeper of sheep.*’ In like manner, ‘*and she conceived and bore Enoch, who became* [literally, ‘and he was’] *a city-builder.*’

Agreeing with him is Kenneth Mathews:

“The Hebrew construction ‘*he was building,*’ however, is ambiguous, permitting Cain or Enoch as the subject.... Eve’s children are named (4:1-2a), and then their vocations are cited by a participle (v. 2b). The same pattern explains 4:17. Enoch is meant as the builder, and the participle indicates his lifelong occupation as a city builder. If so, the city was named after Enoch’s son, ‘Irad.’ The sound plays of *bōneh* (‘*was building*’) and ‘*ir*’ (‘*city*’) with *b’nō* (‘*his son*’) and ‘*irād*’ (‘*Irad*’) further suggests this.” [Mathews, 1:284]

Also agreeing with the Rabbi is Gordon Wenham:

“The major problem posed by this verse is the identity of the builder: is it Cain or Enoch? The former is usually supposed because of the final word in the verse, ‘*after his son’s name, Enoch.*’ **However, the supposition that Cain built the first city comes, strangely, after his condemnation to a wandering life in the immediately preceding verses.** And were it not for the mention of Enoch at the end of v. 17, the subject of ‘*he was building a city*’ would naturally be Enoch as elsewhere in this chapter (vv. 2, 21).... The sentence then reads, ‘*He was building a city and he called the city after his son’s name*’ (i.e., Enoch called the city Irad [cf. v. 18], not Enoch). It is pointed out that this understanding gives a double play on words between ‘*building*’ and ‘*his son,*’ and between ‘*city*’ and ‘*Irad.*’ Furthermore, the name of this city sounds very like ‘*Eridu,*’ which Mesopotamian tradition held to be the oldest city in the world.” [Wenham, 1:111]

If Enoch was the city-builder, the difficulty of reconciling Cain being the city-builder with the judgment of God is dismissed. If Cain was the city-builder, it is difficult to reconcile his actions with what the Lord stated – after all, the judgment of God was not something the Lord was telling Cain to do and hence could be disobeyed but rather a pronouncement of how things would now be for Cain. “It appears more surprising that Cain, who was to be a fugitive and a vagabond upon the earth, should have established himself in the land of Nod. This cannot be fully explained, either on the ground that he carried on the pursuits of agriculture, which lead to settled abodes, or that he strove against the curse.” [Keil, 116]

CONTRA THE PAGAN CULTURES — We once again see Moses passively attacking the surrounding pagan cultures, each of which attributed the development of civilization to their gods. “[*The Torah*] **teaches that human culture was created only by mortals, by ordinary human beings, who were no different from the rest of mankind. In conformity with its usual method the Torah does not controvert or argue; it quietly states the position according to its viewpoint, and**

sets at nought the opposing opinions by its silence.” [Cassuto, 1:230] “If indeed [the biblical writer] had knowledge of [the pagan myths concerning cities], the Genesis account ignores, if not opposes, the pagan notion that civilization derived its highest achievements by divine knowledge.... Rather, Genesis shows cultural achievements to be solely human inventions in the circle of history, though certainly permitted by God in accord with the charge to subdue the earth (1:28).” [Mathews, 1:284]

and he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. — A play upon words, bēn (*‘his son’*) and bōneh (*‘build’*). “Why does Cain name the city after his son? It reflects what is important and significant to him – his progeny. **On the contrary, whenever the righteous name a place in Genesis it is rarely, if ever, called after themselves or their posterity (see 22:14; 28:19; 32:2, 30). The priority of the godly line is Yahweh, not self-glorification.**” [Currid, 1:153]

v. 18 – To Enoch was born Irad; — “The etymology of the names mentioned in this verse is in doubt. We must also consider the possibility that they are not Hebrew names but have their origin in another language, and that they were modified, to a greater or less degree, when they assumed a form suited to the Hebrew tongue.” [Cassuto, 1:231]

Irad, Hebrew, ‘îrād ; possibly derived from *‘flight,’* or related to either *‘wild donkey’* or *‘power, strength.’* Some say it means *‘townsmen.’* If the LXX is to be dependent upon (which spells the word differently than the Hebrew) the word could be related to the Arabic for *‘cane-hut.’*

and Irad was the father of Mehujael, — **Mehujael**, Hebrew, m^ʿchûyā’ēl ; this name too has been given a number of different interpretations: *‘whom God blots out, fattens, smites, quickens,’* and others. If the word is based upon a similar Akkadian word, it could have the sense of *‘the priest of God, the seer of God.’*

and Mehijael the father of Methushael, — Note the second time the father’s name is mentioned it is spelled differently; Cassuto states this is common in Hebrew and not a scribal error.

Methushael, Hebrew, m^ʿthûshā’ēl ; most widely recognized to mean *‘man of God’* (El) and may be compared with Akkadian *mutu-sha-ili*; others suggest *‘man of request (prayer), man of Sheol* or *man of the underworld.’*

and Methushael the father of Lamech. — **Lamech**, Hebrew, lāmekh ; possibly meaning *‘a strong youth’* if its basis is Arabic, but it could be related to Mesopotamian word which signifies a certain class of priests.

v. 19 – And Lamech took unto him two wives; — Since Lamech is the seventh generation from Adam, Scripture speaks of him at length. The text not only mentions the name of his first-born son but tells us who were his wives, who were the sons that each one bore, what these sons originated, and the famous song that Lamech sang to his wives. Lamech represents a degenerate race, one progressively being hardened to sin by sin. Lamech, the first author of polygamy, is a cruel man and destitute of all humanity. The institution of marriage was changed to satisfy human desires, living for the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh. “For the first time in the Bible monogamous marriage breaks down. Lamech has two wives, Adah and Zillah. Thus 2:24 – *‘a man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife’* – becomes *‘... shall cleave to his wives.’* To be sure, no rebuke from God is directed at Lamech for his violation of the marital arrangement. It is simply recorded. But that is the case with most OT illustrations of polygamy. Abraham is not condemned for cohabiting with Sarah and Hagar, nor is Jacob for marrying simultaneously Leah and Rachel. In

fact, however, nearly every polygamous household in the OT suffers most unpleasant and shattering experiences precisely because of this ad hoc relationship. The domestic struggles that ensue are devastating.” [Hamilton, 1:238] Rabbinical tradition adds detail to their sin. “Such was the practice of the generation of the Flood. They would take two wives, one to bear children and the other for pleasure. The latter was meant not to have children and would be pampered like a bride, while the former would be bereft of companionship, and left mourning like a widow throughout her life (so Rashi; Midrash).” [Rabbi Nosson Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, or The Five Books of Moses in book form (Mehorah Publications LTD, Brooklyn NY) 2011, page 23] In addition, the value of life was disdained as Lamech took the murder by Cain a step further.

the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. — Lamech’s wives are named, in part to help the reader understand the opening of Lamech’s poem. They are the audience of Lamech’s prideful boast.

Adah, Hebrew, ‘ādhāh ; her name may mean ‘*ornament, adornment*’ Her name makes sense; a pretty little girl is born, the ‘*ornament*’ of the family. This is also the name of one of Esau’s wives (36:2).

Zillah, Hebrew, tsillāh ; her name may mean ‘*shadow, shade,*’ which at first is curious but if one understands the pleasantness of the rest and ease that wayfarers find in ‘*the shade of trees*’ when the day grows hot then her name makes sense. Others relate her name to an Arabic word meaning ‘*tinkle, to sound*’ which may give the allusion to the sweetness of the female voice. “If this be correct, the names of the two women form an excellent parallel, pointing to the two charming feminine attributes mentioned in Canticles 2:14: ‘*let me see your face, let me hear your voice, for your voice is sweet, and your face is comely.*’” [Cassuto, 1:234]

v. 20 – Adah bore Jabal; — **Jabal**, Hebrew, yāyāl ; his name and also the names of his two brothers are derived from the same stem, yāyal ; apparently these names are intended to point to the important yēyāl (meaning ‘*yield, produce*’) that resulted from the inventions and work of Lamech’s sons.

he was the father – FATHER — The word ‘*father*’ has here both the literal meaning of ‘*forbearer*’ – that is, the children and children’s children of Jabal continued to practice his occupation – and also the sense of ‘*teacher*’ and founder of the customs, practices and ways of life of a given class. [Cassuto, 1:235]

of those who dwell in tents and have cattle. — that is, the father of tent-dwellers (he originated the mode of living in tents) and cattle-rearers (pastoral life that involved animal husbandry). There is no contradiction with Abel’s profession since Abel shepherded ‘*sheep, flocks*’ (tsō’n) which refers to only smaller cattle, sheep and goats. But Jabal tended ‘*herds*’ (miq’neh , ‘*livestock*’), a term that covers not only the aforementioned animals but also even camels and donkeys (47:16-17; Exod 9:3). “Whereas Abel merely lived off his flocks, Yabal could trade with his beasts of burden, and this represents cultural advance.” [Wenham, 1:113] “Possibly this suggests that his contemporaries were acquiring the habit of eating meat as well as fruits and herbs, and thus had disobeyed still another of God’s primal commands (Gen 1:29). Or perhaps it means simply that he was producing them commercially for other purposes: beasts of burden, milk, skins for clothing, and so forth.” [Morris, 146]

v. 21 – His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. — **Jubal**, Hebrew, yûbāl , the father of musicians and the originator of their art, referring in

general to all stringed instruments and all wind instruments. The lyre and the pipe are the oldest and simplest musical instruments.

Lyre, Hebrew, kinnôr ; this is not the instrument that bears that name in modern Hebrew (the violin) but apparently the *lyre*. The lyre was a stringed instrument played with the hand (1 Sam 16:23) and used for both sacred and secular music.



Pipe, Hebrew, ‘ûgāy ; again, this is not the instrument that bears that name in modern Hebrew (the organ) but a kind of pipe. The pipe is mentioned more rarely, often used in parallel with the lyre (Job 21:12; 30:31), and seems to have been a reed or Pan’s pipe. It was used in worship in Ps 150:4.

v. 22 – Zillah, she also bore Tubal-cain, — Tubal-cain, Hebrew, tûyal qayin ; to be read as one word, according to the eastern Masoretes: tûyalqayin . Some commentators believe ‘qayin’ may be an allusion to Tubal’s craft, thus, ‘*Tubal the smith, Tubal the artificer.*’

the instructor — This word is difficult; we would have expected ‘*the father of*’ as in the previous verses. The Hebrew word is lōṭēsh and means ‘*the instructor, the sharpener, the hammerer*’. The RV, RSV translates this as ‘*forg*er’ but that implies a sophistication greater than this word will allow. “Perhaps we should regard our verse as presenting a play upon words similar to that in Prov. 27:17: ‘*IRON SHARPENS IRON, and one man SHARPENS another;*’ that is, Tubal-cain used to ‘*sharpen*’ the sharpeners, to wit, the workers in bronze and iron.” [Cassuto, 1:237]

of every worker in bronze and iron. — Generally speaking the meaning is clear: he invented and perfected the manufacture of bronze and iron articles, he was the inventor of metalwork. While there is not the slightest reference to weapons in the text, several commentators read into this the making of weapons; e.g., “Tubal-cain’s metallurgy probably included weapons as well as agricultural tools. Bearing his ancestor’s name, ‘*Cain,*’ and his descent from murderous Lamech suggest that his craft could be used for ill.” [Mathews, 1:287]

The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. — **Naamah**, Hebrew, na‘amāh ; her name could mean ‘*pleasant, graceful, gorgeous, lovely one*’ and is also the name of Rehoboam’s mother (1 Kgs 14:21). The text tells us nothing about her save her name but Jewish tradition identifies her as Noah’s wife and her deeds were lovely and pleasant. [Rabbi Nossan Scherman, *The Chumash: The Stone Edition*, or *The Five Books of Moses* in book form (Mehorah Publications LTD, Brooklyn NY) 2011, page 23; see also *Bereshith Rabba* 23:3] Another Jewish tradition (Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) depicts her as the leader of the female players and singers, ‘*the mistress of dirges and songs;*’ ‘*she made music on the drum for idolatry.*’ The stem of her name is frequently used in connection with singing and playing in both the Canaanite and Hebrew languages.

Fifth Paragraph – Lamech’s Song:

‘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.”’ (Gen 4:23, 24 NKJV)

Rabbi Cassuto's translation:

**v. 23 – Lamech said to his wives:
Adah and Zillah, / hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, / give ear to my speech;
For a man I slew, / as soon as I wounded (him),
Yea, a young man, / as soon as I bruised (him).
v. 24 – If sevenfold / Cain shall be avenged,
then Lamech / seventy-sevenfold.**

“The song of Lamech contrasts vividly with the mood created by the immediately preceding verses. Along with the growth in cultural advances is a growth in sin. The flowering of culture and invention does not restrain the escalation of sin.” [Hamilton, 1:240]

v. 23 – Lamech said to his wives: Adah and Zillah, — While some commentators suggest the poem commences with the word ‘hear,’ Rabbi Cassuto states the metre proves the wife’s names are part of the poem proper. [Cassuto, 1:239] It is a eulogy and praise of great violence, ‘an arrogant boast of the seed of the serpent.’ [Currid, 1:156] *“Lamech’s taunt-song reveals the swift progress of sin. Where Cain had succumbed to it (7) Lamech exults in it; where Cain had sought protection (14, 15) Lamech looks round for provocation: the savage disproportion of killing a mere lad for a mere wound is the whole point of his boast (cf. 24).”* [Kidner, 78] “The intention of Moses is to describe the ferocity of this man, who was, however, the fifth in descent from the fratricide Cain, in order to teach us, that, so far from being terrified by the example of divine judgment which he had seen in his ancestor, he was only the more hardened. Such is the obduracy of the impious, that they rage against those chastisements of God, which ought at least to render them gentle.” [Calvin, 1:219]

hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech; — The paired verbs ‘hear’ and ‘give ear’ occur frequently in the introductory part of a poem or an address as an invitation to hearken to the words of the poet or speaker, or at the beginning of a prayer to ask God to listen to the voice of the worshiper. [Cassuto, 1:239] Also the two synonyms ‘voice’ and ‘speech’ are regularly coupled in the literary tradition.

‘Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; And hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew’ (Deut 32:1, 2)

‘Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes!’ (Judges 5:3)

‘Then he took up his oracle and said: “Rise up, Balak, and hear! Listen to me, son of Zippor!”’ (Num 23:18)

‘Hear my words, you wise men; Give ear to me, you who have knowledge.’ (Job 34:2)

‘I have called upon You, for You will hear me, O God; Incline Your ear to me, and hear my speech.’ (Ps 17:6)

‘Hear this, all peoples; Give ear, all inhabitants of the world’ (Ps 49:1)

‘Hear my prayer, O God; Give ear to the words of my mouth.’ (Ps 54:2)

‘O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; Give ear, O God of Jacob!’ (Ps 84:8)

‘Hear my prayer, O Lord, Give ear to my supplications!’ (Ps 143:1)

‘Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken’ (Isa 1:2)

‘Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the law of our God, You people of Gomorrah’ (Isa 1:10)

‘Give ear and hear my voice, Listen and hear my speech.’ (Isa 28:23)

‘Rise up, you women who are at ease, Hear my voice; You complacent daughters, Give ear to my speech.’ (Isa 32:9)

‘Yet hear the word of the Lord, O women, And let your ear receive the word of His mouth’ (Jer 9:20)

‘Hear this, O priests! Take heed, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king!’ (Hos 5:1)

‘Hear this, you elders, And give ear, all you inhabitants of the land!’ (Joel 1:2)

For a man I slew, as soon as I wounded (him), Yea, a young man, as soon as I bruised (him). [Cassuto]; For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me.

[NKJV] — These words have had multiple interpretations as old as the Midrashic story of the slaying of Cain, up to the modern view that this eulogizes the achievement of the weapons fashioned by Tubal-cain. But without going into each of the different theories, here is what is generally agreed upon.

● **‘I slew’** — ***Most regard the poem to be actually connected with a specific account which the Torah passes over in silence.*** Cassuto says the verb ‘I slew’ is past tense and thus points to an actual event, ‘I have killed a man’ (AV, NIV, NASB, NRSV, NJPS, NJB, NAB). A few however argue this is a threat that is generally directed to anyone, ‘I kill a man’ (REB), a warning that anyone opposing him does so at his peril. “The idea is this: whoever inflicts a wound or stripe on me, whether man or youth, I will put to death; and for every injury done to my person, I will take ten times more vengeance than that with which God promised to avenge to murder of my ancestor Cain.” [Keil, 1:118] But in the present context illustrating the character of Lamech, it seems more likely that it is meant as a boast. ‘Kill’ (hāragħ^{ti}), a clear allusion to Cain, is found four more times in our narrative, all in connection with him (vv. 8, 14-15, 25).

● **‘a man ... a young man’** — The two words are not speaking of different people but according to the rules of parallelism is the same person. They are placed at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis. The sense is thus, ‘*it was actually a man [’īsh] that I slew, it was indeed a young man [yeledh] that I killed,*’ etc. The first word could refer to a warrior but the second word is literally ‘a boy, a lad, a youth,’ although we should be careful of reading too much into this word. The word can refer to the very young such as the infant Isaac (21:8; cf. 2 Sam 12:15) but also to the teenager Ishmael (21:16) and sometimes to young male adults up to about forty years of age (e.g., Ruth 1:5; 1 Kgs 12:8, 10; Dan 1:4). ***“That yeledh encompasses people other than children is substantiated by the use of this word to describe the young military advisors with whom Rehoboam surrounded himself (1 Kgs 12:8). Here yeledh means ‘young men, young warriors.’”*** [Hamilton, 1:240f] ***Lamech could thus be boasting that this was not an old man whose powers have declined but a young man in the fulness of his strength.***

● **‘wounding me ... striking me’** — ‘wounding me,’ Hebrew (as written in the sentence), l^{phits}’î , and ‘striking me,’ Hebrew (as written in the sentence), l^{chabūrāthî} , are usually understood to mean, ‘*in order to avenge myself for the wound and the bruise that I received...*’. These words are likewise in parallel and refer to the same incident, but the circumstances are not

forthcoming. *Thus the stated reason for Lamech's retaliation was his own (slight) harm suffered at the hands of the 'young man.'* We must bear in mind that 'wounds' and 'bruises' do not as a rule prove fatal, nor are they grave injuries. But Lamech is a man of fierce and cruel disposition, giving no mercy nor forgiveness. He will destroy all that gets in his way. This fits the context since v. 24 speaks specifically of revenge.

v. 24 – If sevenfold Cain shall be avenged, — There is an allusion here, of course, to the Lord's utterance in v. 15, with this difference: when used by the Divine Judge it connotes judicial punishment, but when used by Lamech it is in the sense of pure personal vengeance. *'Of my ancestor it was said that he would be avenged sevenfold, but I shall take vengeance on my enemies seventy-seven-fold; whoever wrongs me in the least forfeits his life.'*

then Lamech seventy-sevenfold. — This is not to be taken literally; 'sevenfold' means 'in perfect measure,' 'seventy-sevenfold' signifies 'in overflowing measure, more than is due, many for one.' Lamech's gloating over a reputation more ruthless than infamous Cain's shows the disparagement of human life among Cain's seed that was fostered by his murder of Abel. ***This is the first recorded incident in the Bible where crime is venerated by the culprit.*** Unlike his ancestor several generations earlier who felt the desperate need of divine protection, Lamech believes he is his own security; he can handle any difficulty or any mistreatment quite adequately by himself. He is not only replete with a spirit of vindictiveness but is also a proud man who backs away from nobody and does not hesitate to kill anybody.

CONTRAST THIS WITH THE TEACHINGS OF OUR LORD JESUS — Almost without exception the commentators reference the teaching of our Master, contrasting Lamech's unending revenge versus God's unending forgiveness. "In the line of Cain, are we not witnessing the way of the world and its lusts? It is the way of self-absorption, greed and avarice. Jesus has taught his followers not to act that way. In the Gospel of Matthew, Peter asks Jesus the following question: *'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?'* Jesus said to him, *'I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.'* (Matthew 18:21-22). Whereas the seed of the serpent professes unlimited revenge, retaliation and selfishness, the seed of the woman is to champion unlimited forgiveness and mercy." [Currid, 1:157]

PRELUDE TO THE FLOOD — ***"So ends the Torah's account of the descendants of Cain. After mentioning their original contribution to human culture, the Bible quotes the song of Lamech, which shows that material progress did not go hand in hand with moral advancement. Not only did violence prevail in the world, but it was precisely in deeds of violence that those generations gloried. The very qualities that are ethically reprehensible, and are hateful in the sight of the Lord, were esteemed in the eyes of men. In such circumstances, the Judge of the whole earth could not but execute judgement. All the achievements of material civilization are not worth anything without moral virtues, and cannot protect man from retribution. We have here a kind of prelude to the decree of the Flood."*** [Cassuto, 1:243f] Currid quotes Matthew Henry: ***"That worldly things are the only things that carnal wicked people set their hearts upon and are most ingenious and industrious about. So it was with the impious race of cursed Cain. Here 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."*** [Currid, 1:155]