



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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Two Kingdoms

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So far in Genesis we've seen a loving Creator who has been spurned and rejected by the people he so lovingly created. Adam and Eve lost faith in his provision and tried to take his role on themselves when they ate from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And yet we've seen that the loving Creator is full of mercy and grace. He cast Adam and Eve out of paradise and out of his presence because of their sin, but we *also* saw that he worked to fix what was broken in their hearts. In his sovereignty he broke their allegiance to sin and turned the desire of their hearts back to him. He also promised that through the woman's seed a Redeemer would come one day to crush the head of the serpent and lead his people into victory over sin and death. Adam and Eve were left to live with the consequences of their sins, but God also gave them hope; they rejected the life he gave, but he promised to restore it to them. God is a stern judge, but he's also a merciful and gracious judge whose ultimate desire is repentance and restoration.

In the next chapter we're told how Adam and Eve had two sons. God promised that through Eve's offspring would come a Redeemer and so the birth of Cain and Abel remind us of God's promise; they give us hope. And yet right at the outset, God turns things upside-down. In the ancient world it was always the eldest son who inherited his father's blessings and his father's wealth. Things happened through the eldest son. The second was, well, a *second* son. And yet we see that it's Abel, the younger, who walked by faith and whose life was acceptable to God. Cain walked by sight and fell into sin. The story

teaches us that God's election to greatness and his calling to ministry don't depend on us or our status or station in life. God chooses whom he will, according to his good pleasure. And yet even as we accept this, our hopes are dashed again: Cain murdered his brother and the last we saw of Cain in verse 16 was his leaving the presence of God—his choosing to walk apart from his Creator.

I want to pick-up from that point this morning, but note: it gets worse before it gets better. What happens when human beings choose to walk apart from God? We'll see what happens as the story plays out in the rest of Chapter 4.

Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city, he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. (Genesis 4:17)

When God sent him out to wander the earth, Cain's biggest fear was that he would be lynched in retaliation for killing Abel, and it's that fear that leads him to build a city. The idea behind the Hebrew word used here for city is a permanent habitation protected by some kind of fortifications. Despite God's promise that no one would be allowed to touch him, Cain still doesn't trust God. He still trusts in himself and his own ability to take care of himself. Nothing's changed. And because Cain doesn't trust God and doesn't walk with God, neither do his sons. In verse 18 we're told about his son, Enoch, and Enoch's descendants: Irad, Mehujael, Methushael, and down to Cain's great-great-great-grandson, Lamech and with Lamech we see just how much sin has corrupted Cain's line.

And Lamech took two wives. The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was

Jubal; he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe. Zillah also bore Tubal-cain; he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah. (Genesis 4:19-22)

On the one hand we see positive developments here. Cain's line introduces the basic elements of civilisation: Cain built the first city; his descendants domesticate livestock, invent tools made out of bronze and iron, and create the first musical instruments. Even with these people who rejected God we see God's common grace at work. And yet alongside these positives, we see that Lamech was the first polygamist, corrupting the institution of marriage that God had given to Adam and Eve: one man, one woman. He takes two wives. Alongside the positive developments we also see an escalation in human violence. Once Cain's family was living in the protection of a fortified city and could make tools of bronze and iron, it wasn't long before those fortifications and those tools were put to use in war. Cain's descendants become increasingly hardened in sin with each generation, corrupting the positive developments and turning them to sinful use. This family developed music, yes, but then we see Lamech using that music to compose a song in which he boasts about his violence:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:

I have killed a man for wounding me,

a young man for striking me.

If Cain's revenge is sevenfold, then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:23-24)

Humanity is going from bad to worse; sin is compounding with each generation. Lamech takes God's role as judge on himself: “If God promised seven-fold vengeance on anyone who killed Cain, I declare that *seventy-seven-fold* vengeance will fall on anyone who even strikes at me!” John

Walton summarises the situation, “The text has moved from unrepentant Cain to defiant Lamech. Violence is glorified, and the mark of Cain no longer stands as a stigma of exile but as a badge of honor that brings protection equivalent to invulnerability. The human situation is degenerating.”¹ Imagine reading this for the first time and wondering where you could find hope in this mess. The good news is that Cain’s line isn’t the only place to look for hope. As we’ll see over the course of our study of Genesis, the storyteller often likes to give us the details of dead-end lines and genealogies just before taking us back to the second (or the third) son to show us the unlikely hero. And he does just that in verses 25 and 26:

And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.” To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the LORD.

The narrator takes us back seven generations—back to Adam and to Eve—and we see that they have a third son. In his name we see the growth of Eve’s faith. When she named Cain she only shared the credit for his birth with God: “I got myself a son with God’s help.” This time she acknowledges that Seth is entirely God’s gift to her. “Seth” means “granted”. He was God’s gracious gift to a mother and father who had lost one son to murder and the other to exile. And the hope we put in this new line of Seth grows as we see that Seth named his son “Enosh”, which literally means “weakness”. It symbolises Seth’s knowledge of his dependence on God. And of course, once we know and understand that we are dependent on God, human beings

naturally turn to him in prayer and in worship. That’s exactly what the text means when it says that it was at this time that people began to call on the name of the Lord. They knew that it was God who was ultimately responsible for their daily bread and so they gave him thanks and worshiped him. Because they knew that he took care of them, when they were in need they called on his name in prayer. And as they saw their own sin and their need for redemption, as they remembered the promise that the offspring of the woman would one day crush the head of the serpent and conquer sin and death, they called on the name of the Lord for a Redeemer. They didn’t know when he would come; they didn’t know his name; but just as we do, they called out in prayer: “Come, Lord Jesus!”

These are the two lines that we saw setup in Chapter 3: the seed of the serpent (all those who throw their lot in with the serpent and pledge their allegiance to sin) and the seed of the woman (all those who trust in God’s promise, who look forward to the Redeemer, and who choose to walk in holiness). Sixteen-hundred years ago St. Augustine looked back on these two lines, these two genealogies here in Chapters 4 and 5, and wrote about the two cities. There is an earthly city; a city built by worldly people, at first to protect themselves, but eventually to challenge God himself as we’ll see at Babel in Chapter 11. But there’s also the city of God; a heavenly city, a heavenly kingdom, that the righteous live in by faith and to the coming of which they look forward in hope.

Chapter 5 now walks us through the story of the line of Seth. We see those words again in verse 1 that introduce a new “book” or “chapter” in Genesis.

This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named

them Man [*adam*] when they were created. When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth. The days of Adam after he fathered Seth were 800 years; and he had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days that Adam lived were 930 years, and he died. (Genesis 5:1-5)

The rest of the chapter is a list of “begats” that runs through verse 32:

Seth fathered Enosh when he was 105 and then lived to be 912 years old. Enosh fathered Kenan when he was 90 and lived to be 905. Kenan fathered Mahalel when he was 70 and lived to be 910. Mahalel fathered Jared when he was 65 and lived to be 895. Jared fathered Enoch (a different Enoch) when he was 162 and lived to be 962. Enoch fathered Methusela when he was 65 and lived to be 365. Methuselah fathered Lamech (also, a different Lamech) when he was 187 and lived to be 969. Lamech fathered Noah when he was 182 and lived to be 777. And, finally, we’re told that sometime after Noah’s five-hundredth birthday, he fathered Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Along with the notice that each of these men also fathered other sons and daughter, there are a few important details in these verses that we’ll come back to in a bit. But, first, what’s the significance of all this and what should we make of the long lifespans? And how does this fit into history? Not quite 400 years ago, Archbishop Ussher sat down to calculate the date of Creation and, making very “literal” use of genealogies like this, he concluded that God began creating the world the evening of October 22, 4004 B.C. There are some Christians who agree with him, but most people find that hard to swallow. Even setting aside issues having to do with the age of the earth, archaeologists have mountains of artifacts from human civilisations going back ten, fifteen,

¹ John Walton, *Genesis*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), p. 278.

even twenty thousand years. If we take Chapter 5 at what would seem to be face value to us, Adam died only a century and a quarter before the birth of Noah who lived at a time when we're told the entire human race had become horribly depraved.

First, what's the point of this list of "begats"? Ancient people wrote genealogies for the same reason we do; it was how they showed connections between something or someone a long time ago and someone who lived later or who lived at the time the genealogy was written. In places like Egypt and Sumer genealogies were written to show the descent of current kings from the kings of old and often from the gods. We see that same sort of purpose here. Remember that all these stories and accounts and genealogies were edited and arranged the way we have them while the Jewish people were in exile in Babylon. This was their opportunity to organize their history and a chance to ask what had happened: If God promised us an inheritance, why are we sitting in exile in Babylon? They knew that God's promises and his covenant were important; they were the basis for their faith as they're the basis for ours. And so the genealogies in the Bible show the connection between later people—like the Jews in Babylon or even Jesus himself—with the very people who had lived so long before and with whom God had established his covenant: people like Adam, Noah, Abraham. In that sense their genealogies are like our genealogies: they're historical.

But their genealogies are different than ours are in some ways. In my 20s I took up an interest in genealogy that eventually led me to join the Sons of the American Revolution. The SAR is a lineage society for men whose ancestors served in the American Revolution. In order to join, you have to *prove* your line of descent. They don't take Grandma's word that Great-

great-grandpa So-and-So was in the New York Continentals. You have to provide a paper trail of birth, baptismal, death, and marriage certificates; census records; wills; property deeds; and military service records showing every generation and proving its connection with the one before it and the one that came after. Genealogy in ancient Israel was just as important, but it was done very differently. One of the biggest differences was that their genealogies didn't have to show every single generation. The ESV reads "fathered" in Genesis 5, which may give us the wrong impression. The Hebrew word refers to the direct fathering of a child by a man—as with Adam and Seth—or it can describe one person simply as the ancestor of another. When we compare other biblical genealogies we sometimes see generations present in some that are missing in others. Their point wasn't to list every single generation, but to show the historical connection between the present and the past and that for them that didn't require a listing of every generation, just a general line of descent to make a connection or to show a pattern.

We see this here in that the genealogy in Chapter 5 is constructed to parallel the one in Chapter 4. The first one lists seven generations that become progressively more sinful, culminating with a violent murderer. The second one lists seven generations of men who walked in righteousness. Even the names suggest that these were people who trusted God. Hebrew names ending in *-el* or *-iah* refer to God. And this genealogy reaches its high point with Enoch, who, like Lamech, is seventh from Adam, but in contrast to the evil Lamech, walked with God so closely that one day God simply took him to heaven.

Remember too that these genealogies were passed down orally long before they were written. They were composed to be easily remembered. I could never tell you the full names of

the last seven generations of my family, the ages at which the firstborn sons were fathered, or their ages when they died—at least not in a way acceptable to the SAR. But ancient people composed their genealogies for easy memory. They incorporated the things we see here, like seven parallel generations. They also used round numbers and symbolic numbers.

And of course, that leads us to ask what the numbers mean here. Did Methuselah really live to be 969 years old? Let me say first, if these numbers sound unrealistically large, consider that the Sumerians wrote very similar genealogies for their kings and that the youngest of those kings is said to have lived 18,600 years and the oldest 43,200 years! It's easier to understand what's going on here when we look at how genealogies were used by Israel's neighbours. One of the most important things we see is the symbolic use of numbers. This doesn't mean that these people didn't live incredibly long lives. If they didn't live these long lives, then it doesn't make sense for God to tell Noah that from his time on, the days of human beings would be limited to 120 years. Their long lives might have been the aftereffects of Adam having eaten from the Tree of Life when he lived in the garden. But that doesn't mean that these numbers aren't also symbolic. The problem is that no one's really sure how the symbolism works out. Several Bible scholars² have shown how these numbers are tied to astronomic periods. Others have shown how the numbers symbolize things like perfection and godliness. Getting into

² M. Barnouin, "Recherches numériques sur la généalogie de Gen. V," *Revue biblique* 77 (1970), pp. 347-365; C. Schedl, "Der brennende Dornbusch: der Kosmos als Erscheinungsbild Gottes," in A. Resch, ed., *Kosmopathie* (Imago Mundi VIII), Innsbruck, 1981, pp. 677-711; and C.J. Labuschagne, "The Life Spans of the Patriarchs," in A.S. van der Woude, ed., *New Avenues in the Study of the Old Testament*. (Leiden: Brill, 1989), pp. 121-127.

the details is too technical for Sunday morning, but needless to say, each explanation has its compelling points and its flaws. Regardless of the specifics, the point seems to be to show that God was sovereignly at work in the godly line of Seth. These men walked with God; they walked in righteousness; and because they did, he blessed them with long life and with ideal lives. At the same time, these men walked with God because his providential hand was at work. He had promised a Redeemer and he was, slowly but surely, turning the wheels of redemptive history.

We see this in particular in two people listed here. We see it first in Enoch. Again, we first saw Cain's line, the seed of the serpent, degenerating into sin, culminating with violent Lamech in the seventh generation. In stark contrast, here we have Enoch in the seventh generation who shows us the difference between the earthly city and the heavenly city. Seth's righteous descendants lived in the earthly city, but their true home and their true citizenship was in heaven. The story doesn't give us the details of Enoch's life, but it's not hard to imagine. The text says that he "walked with God". This is the same phrase used later to describe Noah, whom we're told was blameless among the people of his day. It's also the same phrase used to describe Abraham and Isaac as faithful servants of God. Cain and his descendants walked by sight; Seth and his descendants walked by faith. I picture Enoch walking with God each day. Each day his faith takes him further and further from the earthly city until one evening as the sun is setting God turns to him and says, "Enoch, we've walked a long way today. We're closer to my house than to yours. Why don't you come home with me tonight."

Even in just these few words telling us about Enoch and how God took him, the people of God have hope as they live in the earthly city. Walk with

God in faith and the tree of life is yours. Walk with God in faith and one day he will lead you back to the garden, back to paradise. And yet Enoch's being taken underscores that the rest of us, even as we walk in faith, still live under the curse. He gives us hope, but we still live with the reality of sin and so we direct our hope to the Redeemer whose once-for-all sacrifice for sin makes the city of God an earthly reality. Enoch was a special case. His son, Methuselah lived out his 969 years in the earthly city. And Methuselah's son, Lamech, lived out his 777 years in the earthly city too. They walked by faith, but all around them they saw the effects of sin; all around them they saw the descendants of Cain and the seed of the serpent; all around them they saw things getting worse instead of better. They longed for the heavenly city, but were stuck in the earthly one. And so when his son was born, Lamech cried out in faith and hope and named his son Noah, which means "rest" or "comfort". Cain's descendants and the people of the earthly city look for salvation from their troubles in violence; Seth's descendants, the righteous people of the city of God, looked for deliverance from sin and its consequences. Little did he know that Noah would do just that, although probably not in the way he expected.

Brothers and sisters, the story of Cain's fall reminded us last week that our God desires repentance and restoration. Sin must be punished, but he rejoices over repentant sinners. He has provided a Redeemer whose own righteous blood was shed as a sacrifice for our sins, who took our punishment on himself, and now he gives us a choice just he gave to Cain: Walk apart from me in judgement, in sin and death; or walk with me in faith and receive the gift of new and eternal life. The stories we've seen today of these two lines, one following Cain in sin and the other following Seth in righteousness, show us that again the choice is still open to us.

The way of sin and rebellion leads to death. Many theologians have argued that hell is a place where the common grace of God is completely absent and where human depravity and selfishness are completely unrestrained; a place where every man and every woman is like violent Lamech. Imagine a violent, no-holds-barred game of "King of the Mountain". But this one's no game. Every man and every woman fights to reach the top and the result is human carnage. That's the eternal destiny of those who walk in sin. But, friends, if we will "call on the name of the Lord", if we will walk with him, acknowledging our sins, acknowledging that we need a Saviour, putting our faith his blood shed at the cross, trusting in him and not ourselves, like Enoch, God will lead us one day back to the Tree of Life. He gives us a foretaste of that day as we come this morning to his Table. Here he offers us the body and blood his Son, and here by faith we receive the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation. As we receive the life he offers through Jesus Christ by faith, let us also walk in hope each day, knowing that the Lord Jesus has broken the curse. We walk in the earthly city, but let us witness to the world the light of the city of God.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, thank you for your gracious mercy. We rebelled against you, but you have turned our hearts back to you and given us a means of redemption in your Son, Jesus Christ. Give us grace each day to turn our backs on sin and instead to call on you and to walk in faith in Jesus. And as we walk in faith through the earthly city, let us be effective witnesses of your heavenly city. We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.