

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 killing of a mere lad (Hebrew *yeled*, 'child') for a mere wound is the whole point of his boast. (*Genesis* p. 78)

Reflect:

- Sin is personal, yet it affects families and whole societies. In Ezekiel 18 we are reminded that "the soul that sins is the one who will die" (v. 4). And yet the third commandment speaks of children punished "for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me" (Ex. 20.5). How do we relate personal responsibility with the communal results of human sin? In what situations and to what extent do we observe this principle at work in our own time?

Read: Genesis 4.25-26.

The chapter ends with two positive notes of hope. The birth of Seth is a continuation of the line of faith. Eve acknowledged that "God has granted me another child in place of Abel..." (v. 25). This was the genealogical line to Noah and, through him, to all people now living.

"At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD" (v. 26b). "LORD" (*Yahweh*) is the distinctive covenant-name of God. It refers here to people coming into a personal relationship with God. Perhaps it also infers that these God-people were becoming identified in the surrounding non-supportive society by their distinctive faith.

Reflect:

- We don't have to be swept along with prevailing social attitudes. What does it mean for us to "call on the name of the LORD"?
- How can today's "line of faith" remain true to our calling in the midst of an "unbelieving and perverse generation" (Mt. 17.17)?

5. The Line of Grace. Reading: Genesis 5-6.8.

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Studies in Genesis chapters 1-11

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4. My Brother's Keeper?

Reading: Genesis 4

On 17 January 1984 we were heading north towards Yamba, northern New South Wales, near the end of our leave. We had travelled many kilometres, following the coast down to Melbourne and returning via the Snowy Mountains. The attitudes of various drivers along the way evoked this comment –

Vehicles (and their drivers) in a long line on the open highway illustrate so many of the attitudes to life.

The driver who pulls over at a convenient point – "I can't go faster. Sorry to hold you up!"

The driver who cuts out and in, forcing other drivers to brake to avoid him – "I've got to get through. I don't care about other drivers – they're just nuisances!"

The driver who sits behind the slow vehicle, is hesitant to pass and doesn't drop back so others can – "I can't do it, but I'm going to hold my place in the line".

Well, what do you do? There are just so many stupid idiots out there, aren't there? Now... are there? Odd thing is how lenient we are about our own behaviour and so condemning about others!

I don't know about you, but I'm always thankful for those generous drivers who actually let you out of your centre- or side-of-the-road parking spot. I give them a wave of acknowledgement. But it seems there are many drivers who have never had that difficulty – or have they somehow switched identities? I have a sneaking suspicion that the aggressive drivers who are impatient at pedestrian crossings are also demanding pedestrians once out of their cars.

In so many ways society is telling us that "you must to look after Number One". Some people are careless of their own health and well-being and need to be told that. Most respond rather too readily to that sort of prompting!

Reflect:

- What are the indications that we have become a very self-centred society? Why do we tend to overdo "looking after Number One"?

Cain and Abel

Read: Genesis 4.1-7.

No indication is given how long the life in Eden had continued before the Fall. Although they had been told to “be fruitful and increase in number” (1.28), they hadn’t given birth to any children. All their children were affected by the Fall. Their first two were Cain and Abel. With Cain, Eve acknowledged the blessing of the LORD in this birth (4.1). Did she think that it was through Cain that the promise of 3.15 would be fulfilled?

“Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil” (v. 2b). There is no implied divine preference for shepherding over against agriculture. God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering rather than Cain’s stemmed, not from the difference of offerings, but from the difference of their attitude of heart.

God graciously questioned Cain (as he did Adam and Eve in 3.9). There was still the possibility of repentance, but a warning against giving in to further temptation – “But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it” (3.7).

Reflect:

- “No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Cor. 10.13). Consider Cain’s situation. At this point, what was his “way out”? And in our own lives, how do we find the “way out” of temptation?

Responsibility for Sin

Reading: Genesis 4.8-16.

Following the LORD’s warning Cain spoke to his brother Abel. The Hebrew text doesn’t tell us what he said, though a number of ancient translations have the words, “Let’s go out into the field” (as in NIV).

The Jerusalem *Targum* supplies an account of the conversation – “Cain said to Abel his brother, ‘There is no judgment, nor Judge, nor will a good reward be given to the righteous; nor will vengeance be taken of the wicked; neither is the world created in mercy nor governed in mercy; otherwise, why is your offering received with good will, and mine not?’ Abel answered and said to Cain, ‘There is a judgment...’ and so went on to assert everything

Cain denied, and to give a reason why the offering of the one was accepted, and the other rejected”.

Whatever the verbal interchange, the result was premeditated murder. The simple, seemingly “innocent” eating of forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve was already having disastrous results in the next generation.

The LORD’s first question to Adam and Eve, “Where are you?” now becomes “Where is your brother Abel?” (v. 9). When Adam and Eve replied, at least they didn’t deny what they had done, even though they “shuffled” on the issue of responsibility. But Cain’s “I don’t know” is a denial of his act, followed by a denial of responsibility anyway – “Am I my brother’s keeper?”

So the LORD spells out both crime and punishment. Even the ground on which Abel’s blood was spilled will be cursed. But the greatest punishment of all is to be separated from God and to be “a restless wanderer on the earth” (vv. 12,14). We have no idea what the “mark on Cain” was (v. 15). We note, however, that the LORD was not about to destroy the human race because of the escalation of sin. The “land of Nod” (v. 16) was the place of his wandering exile – away from the LORD’s presence.

Reflect:

- “Am I my brother’s keeper?” We are surely shocked by Cain’s guilty glibness. In what ways is this an issue in today’s society?
- The “expert in the law” asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?” (Lk 10.29) Reflect on Jesus’ reply – the parable of the good Samaritan (vv. 30-36).

Cain’s Descendants

Read: Genesis 4.17-24.

The genealogy from Cain is recorded only as far as Lamech. We note the beginning of more settled civilisation – a city (v. 17) – though some continued the nomadic life-style (v. 20). We read of the emergence of musicians, metal-workers and... poets – verses 23 and 24 probably represent the first poem ever written.

What we also notice, however, is the continued moral decline. Lamech had two wives – not unknown in later Israel, but contrary to the divine creative purpose in 2.24. And while he murdered in self-defence, there is a certain joyful glee in what he has done. To quote Derek Kidner again: