Introduction to Genesis Chapter 4:
Birth, Jealousy, and Violent Death

[NS] The narrative now turns to the fortunes of humankind in the harsh world outside Eden. The flow of time that separates the events of chapter 3 from those about to be described is of no consequence and therefore goes unmentioned. The focus of the narrative is not history, but the human condition.

The previous and present chapters are closely linked by several common themes: free will, personal responsibility, and inevitable punishment for wrongdoing. The opening verse harks back to 3.16, 20 as the woman begins to fulfill her appointed destiny: propagation of the species—the continuity of life through the constant regeneration of the human race. Outside of Eden, this is the answer of humankind to the quest for immortality; it is a perpetual triumph over death.

The preceding narrative focuses on the role of greed and unbridled ambition, and the present chapter deals with the place of the irrational in human conduct. The former offense was against God; now it is man against his brother, which also is an offense against God. It was the "fruit of the tree" that led to the downfall of Adam and Eve; it is the "fruit of the soil" that leads to Cain's undoing. The first human was worried about death; now the experience of death becomes a reality.

Apart from these thematic parallels, several other correspondences tighten the bond between the two chapters: the name Eve occurs here too and never again in the Bible; the verb "to know" appears four times in each chapter; verse 7 here virtually reproduces 3.16; the divine question to the culprit in each case—"Where?"— receives an evasive reply in both chapters; the wording of the curse upon Adam in 3.14 is echoed in that upon Cain in 4.11; the son, like his parents in the previous chapter, is "banished" and settles to the east of Eden.

The present chapter divides into four distinct units: Cain and Abel (vv. 1–16), the Genealogy of Cain (vv. 17–22), the Song of Lamech (vv. 23–24), and Seth and Enosh (vv. 25–26). Tying together these apparently discrete units are notices about the developments in civilization that each contains. These developments number seven in all: agriculture, sheep-breeding, urbanism, pastoralism, music, metallurgy, religion. The symbolic number seven is featured repeatedly: sevenfold vengeance is invoked (vv. 15, 24); Lamech is the seventh generation from Adam; his song refers to "sevenfold" and "77"; the number of souls mentioned in all, from Adam to Lamech's offspring, is 14 (twice seven); and the name Abel appears seven times, as do also the words "brother" and "name."

CAIN AND ABEL (vv. 1–16)

This narrative has often been interpreted as a reflection of the traditional conflict between the farmer and the nomad, and its supposed bias in favor of the latter is seen as representing a nomadic ideal in Israel. This is unlikely. The evidence for such an ideal in biblical literature is extremely flimsy. Further, there is not the slightest suggestion in the text of any comparative evaluation of the vocations of Cain and Abel, nor is there the slightest disparagement of the tiller of the soil. On the contrary, agriculture is regarded as the original occupation of man in the Garden of Eden as well as outside it. The sentence upon Cain is restricted to him alone; his sons are not made into vagrants or stigmatized in any way. Finally, the three pillars of semi-nomadic culture, as set forth in verses 20–22, are actually said to have originated with the descendants of Cain.

The narrative, which is extraordinarily terse and sketchy here, gives no explicit reason for the unacceptability of Cain's offering and no explanation for the manner by which this is revealed. Cain

lived in an unpopulated world. Of whom was he afraid? And who was there for him to marry? The presumption is inescapable that an independent narrative, in which these details presented no problem, was once well known in Israel. The difficulties now apparent arose when the Torah chose only the bare bones of the story as a vehicle for the expression and inculcation of certain fundamental truths about some of life's most perplexing problems.

[WGP] FARMER AND SHEPHERD

Much of Israel's early history is connected with shepherds, the nomadic life, and experiences encountered in traveling through wilderness lands. The Ancestors were nomads or semi-nomads, and both Moses and David were shepherds. The Bible exhibits two contradictory opinions about the nomadic life. On the one hand it appears as a punishment for rebelliousness—Cain being the first example, and the Israelites in the wilderness the most important. On the other hand, withdrawal from the settled life appeared conducive to spiritual illumination—Moses at Mount Sinai and Elijah in the wilderness being the prime illustrations.

Nomads considered settled people, such as farmers or city-dwellers, as slaves to possessions and prone to corruption, a tradition that even in modem times has considered rural morals as superior to those practiced in the city.

The Cain-and-Abel struggle contains both traditions: Cain is condemned to live in the Land of Nomads, which is the punishment for his offense; but he is also credited with having built the city of Enoch, possibly reflecting a negative opinion about urban, settled life.

[WGP] THE REJECTED SACRIFICE

Both Cain and Abel bring sacrifices to God—only Abel's is accepted; the biblical writer offers no explanation for God's choice.

Some commentators maintain that the key to God's preference may be found in the intent of the two worshipers. While Cain brings merely "an offering," Abel brings "the choicest" of his flock. One performs outward motions, the other offers the service of his heart.

A better interpretation, however, is that God's rejection of Cain's offering is inexplicable in human terms. God acts in accordance with divine wisdom: "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious" (Exod. 33.19). God's reasons are un-known to us. The inexplicability of divine preferment marks Cain as an essentially tragic character; he reacts with blind violence to a rejection he cannot comprehend. As Cyrus Gordon notes, "We are accustomed to think of him with revulsion: but the text of Genesis aims rather at evoking our sympathy for a man who atoned for his crime with homelessness and fear—a fate worse than death."

[WGP] AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

Few phrases have been quoted more often than this bold counter-question that Cain flings back at God. But the meaning is far from clear. The following explanations have been suggested:

 • The question implies the answer, for by asking the question of God, Cain acknowledges a higher moral authority. There is someone to whom we must answer for our deeds. The theme is human responsibility. God, by the punishment meted out, asserts that Cain is indeed his brother's keeper.

• Cain's question is essentially defiant: "How would I know—or care?" Cain, the first product of the post-Eden world, is a man who defies God. "The idea of...rebelliousness, by which Genesis explains the origins of the human condition," writes Yechezkel Kaufmann, "is a fundamental idea of biblical literature and of Israelite religion in general. One might call the Bible a chronicle of human rebellion."

• According to Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, when God asked Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" Cain answered, "Am I my brother's keeper? You are God. You have created me, and it is Your task to watch him, not mine. If I ought not to have done what I did, You could have prevented me from doing it." Thus, Cain makes God responsible or at least co-responsible for his own actions. Note that God does not reply. The question "Am I my brother's keeper?" remains unanswered and has remained so despite the questions of succeeding generations. Why is God silent when people kill each other? Where does divine power begin and where does it end? God asks us to account for our deeds. We turn the question back to God and ask: Am I alone my brother's keeper? Are You not as well? If my brother's blood cries out against me, does it not cry out against You, too?

Rabbi Shimon emphasizes this by pointing out that a slight shift in Genesis 4:10 (xxx instead of xxx) would make God, who now accuses Cain by stating, "Your brother's blood cries out to Me," say sorrowfully, "Your brother's blood cries out against Me." Rabbi Shimon, aware of the implications of his comment, says: "It is difficult to say such a thing [that is, to read the text as it ought to be read] and the mouth cannot utter it [as it would imply the blaming of God]." He compared the God-Cain-Abel triangle to two gladiators fighting before a ruler, who could stop the contest any minute, but who lets it proceed to the bitter, deadly end. Is that one not, by maintaining silence, involved in the killing?

This last interpretation is appealing not only because it asks questions of great urgency today, but also because it allows for a direct continuation of the Eden story. There, the human choice was essentially between life and death; now, in the post-Eden world, God offers us a new choice, the choice between good and evil. Cain chooses murder, the ultimate evil. And having granted humanity moral freedom, God, in a sense, shares in its transgressions. But though we may ask where God was at the hour of violence, God's failure to answer does not reduce our responsibility.

Genesis Chapter 4—Translations and Commentary

1. Now the man knew [*yada*, often used in a sexual sense—JPS] his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, "I have gained [*kaniti*, connected with "Cain"—JPS; "I have created"—REF] a male child with the help of the Lord. [Both I and the Eternal have made a man"—CS]

2. She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper [sheperd—EF, REF, CS; herder—RA] of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil.

[NS] 1. the man knew "Knowing" in the Bible is not essentially intellectual activity[; it is] not simply the objective contemplation of reality. Rather, it is experiential, emotional, and, above all, relational. For that reason, the Hebrew stem *y-d-'* can encompass a range of meanings that includes involvement, interaction, loyalty, and obligation. It can be used of the most intimate and most hallowed relationships between man and wife and between man and God. Significantly, the verb is never employed for animal copulation. The Hebrew construction here employed usually indicates a pluperfect sense; that is, it would normally be rendered "the man had known." This leads Rashi to conclude that coition had already taken place in the Garden of Eden before the expulsion, an interpretation that finds support in 3.20. There is nothing to sustain the idea that sexual activity first occurred outside Eden. The Hebrew phrase in our text does not need to imply that we have here the first occurrence of sexual experience.

I have gained Hebrew *kaniti*, which derives from a stem *k-n-h*, is here connected with the name "Cain," which can only be related to *k-y-n*. The former verb (*k-n-h*) usually means "to acquire, own," while the latter, in several Semitic languages, denotes "to form, fashion, forge." In fact, in Arabic and Aramaic, *kayn* means a "smith."

a male child Hebrew *'ish*, "man," never otherwise refers to a newborn babe. The usage here is influenced by Adam's jubilant cry in 2.23 at the creation of woman. Eve now says, in effect: "I, woman (*'ish(sh)ah*), was produced from man (*'ish*); now I, woman, have in turn produced a man."

with the help of the Lord In Hebrew *'et Adonai*; the sign of the accusative *'et* often has the sense of "together with." A similar phrase is used in the Akkadian Atranasis Epic when the mother goddess Mami, who has been ordered to create man, replies that she can do so only with the help of the god Enki *(itti Enki-ma)*. The role of God in human procreation is frequently acknowledged in the Bible. As BT Niddah 31a expresses it, "There are three co-partners in the production of a human being: God, father, and mother."

the Lord The most sacred divine name Adonai is here uttered by a human being, a woman, for the first time.

2. his brother The absence of the formula "she conceived and bore" led to the tradition that Cain and Abel were twins.

Abel No explanation for this choice is given. Hebrew *hevel* means "breath, nothingness." The name may augur his destiny; or it may be a reflection of his fate. Hevel is often used to express the fleeting nature of life.

keeper of sheep. . . tiller of the soil Adapting to the new ecological conditions encountered outside Eden, human society produces a mixed subsistence economy based on stockbreeding and agriculture. Labor becomes specialized. Cain, the firstborn, follows his father's occupation, while Abel branches out to new areas. The two parts of the economy supplement each other. *Since, in the biblical view, mankind was vegetarian until after the Flood, the function of animal husbandry at this point was to supply milk, hides and wool.*

Guide to the Translators and Commentators used here
EF: Everett Fox   **REF:** Richard Elliott Friedman   **RA:** Robert Alter   **NS**: Nahum Sarna **CS**: Chaim Stern
SRH: Samson Raphael Hirsch   **RASHI:** Rabbi Shlomo ben Yitzchak   **OJPS**: Old Jewish Publication Society version
WGP: W. Gunther Plaut, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* [4]   **TWC:** *The Torah: A Women's Commentary*

3. In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil;

4. and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to [paid attention to—REF; approved—CS] Abel and his offering],

5. but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed [had no respect—OJPS;. Cain was much distressed [was very wroth—OJPS; exceedingly upset—EF; was very incensed—RA; was filled with rage—CS] and his face fell.

6. And the Lord said to Cain,

"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?

7. Surely, if you do right,There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."

EF: Is it not thus: / If you intend good, bear-it-aloft, / but if you do not intend good, / at the entrance is sin, a crouching-demon, / toward you his lust— / but you can rule over him. **RA:** Why are you incensed, / and why is your face fallen? / For whether you offer well, / or whether you do not, / at the tent flap sin crouches / and for you is its longing, / but you will rule over it." **CS:** "Why are you so angry? / Why your fallen face? / Would you not do well to lift it? / For if you do not do well— / sin is a demon at the door; / you are the one it craves, / and yet you can govern it."]

3–5. The two sons, unlike their parents in Eden, subsisted through the toil of their hands. In the fruits of their labors, they recognized divine blessing, and they felt gratitude to God for His bounty. Their offerings were spontaneous, not a response to divine command. The reason for God's different reactions may be inferred from the descriptions of the offerings: Abel's is characterized as being "the choicest of the firstlings of his flock"; Cain's is simply termed as coming "from the fruit of the soil," without further detail. *Abel appears to have demonstrated a quality of heart and mind that Cain did not possess. Cain's purpose was noble, but his act was not ungrudging and openhearted.* Thus the narrative conveys *the fundamental principle of Judaism that the act of worship must be informed by genuine devotion of the heart.* It also teaches that the two aspects of divine worship— the cultic act and the verbal element—are separate in origin. Further on, in verse 26, prayer is said to be a later development, independent of sacrifice. *This constitutes a revolutionary development in the religious thinking of the ancient world*, where the two elements were inextricably interconnected, the one inoperative without the other, because the religious act was essentially magical and required for its effectiveness both the spoken word and the praxis.

By severing the two, the religion of Israel stressed the exceptional, non-magical nature of prayer. In the same vein, the official priestly sacrificial ritual prescribed in the Book of Leviticus is not accompanied by prayer. Tradition consistently ascribes the institutions of sacrifice to Moses and the introduction of the recitation of psalms to David.

4. paid heed Based on such passages as Leviticus 9.24, Judges 6.21, 1 Kings 18.38, and 2 Chronicles 7.1, ancient and medieval commentators imagined fire descending from heaven and devouring Abel's offering but leaving Cain's untouched.6. distressed Cain's mood is depression, not anger. Hebrew *charah l'* expresses despondency or distress, as opposed to *charah 'af*, which means "to be angry."

8. Cain said to his brother Abel...and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. [NOTE: Ancient versions, including the Targum, read "Cain said to his brother Abel, "Come, let us go out into the field."—JPS; RA adds this phrase to his translation]

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8. Cain said to his brother Abel. . . The three dots draw attention to the lacuna. The Aramaic Targums, like the Greek, Syriac, and Latin versions of the text, add: "Come let us go into the field." This is also the reading of the Samaritan text. Ramban (Nachmanides) also took this to be the sense of the passage. On the basis of the usage in Exodus 19.25 and Esther 1.18, many Jewish commentators took the unexpressed object of the verb to be the foregoing words of God. Others took Hebrew *va-yo'mer* to mean "He had words with him."

in the field Hebrew *sadeh* refers to the open, uninhabited country away from the settled areas. It was often the scene of crime.

killed him Cain's depression gives way to an irrational act of aggression. The first recorded death is not from natural causes but by human hands, an ironic comment on the theme of chapter 3. Man and woman had striven to gain immortality, but their first-born brings the reality of death into the world. The narrative illustrates one of the most lamentable aspects of the human condition, one that is a recurrent theme in the Bible—namely, the corruption of religion. An act of piety can degenerate into bloodshed.

[REF] 8. it was while they were in the field. What is the significance of informing us that they are in a field at the time? Early biblical commentators searched for the meaning of this seemingly inconsequential detail. But to understand it, we must observe, first, that fratricide recurs repeatedly in the Tanach. It begins here with Cain and Abel and ends with King Solomon executing his brother Adonijah; and in between these the issue of fratricide comes up in the stories of Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers, Abimelech killing seventy of his brothers (Judges 9), the war between Benjamin and its fellow tribes of Israel (Judges 20), the struggle between Israel and Judah (2 Samuel 2:26-27), and King David's sons Absalom and Amnon (2 Samuel 13-14).

The word "field" repeatedly occurs in these stories. In Absalom's case, the "wise woman of Tekoa" comes and tells David a fake story about her own two sons, claiming that one of them killed the other. In the course of her tale, she mentions a seemingly unrelated detail: they fought "in the field" (2 Samuel 14.6). The same "inconsequential" detail that occurs in the Cain-Abel story occurs there. Likewise in the story of the rivalrous brothers Jacob and Esau, Esau comes to Jacob "from the field" (Genesis 25.29). Joseph begins his report of his dream that offends his brothers with the words "here we were binding sheaves in the field" (Genesis 37.7). The recurring word, therefore, appears to be a means of connecting the many instances of brother killing brother. It recognizes that sibling rivalry is felt by nearly all humans, and it warns us to be sensitive to keep our hostile feelings in check—and to be sensitive to our siblings' feelings as well. This will be developed through this chain of sibling stories in Genesis, culminating in Joseph, who offends his brothers in his youth (Genesis 37:2-11) but who learns to show them understanding and kindness in his mature years (50:15-21).

Cain rose against Abel his brother. It never tells why, exactly, he kills him. Many suggestions have been made. But it is significant that the text never tells what the reason is. It implies, of course, that it is his anger over God's favoring Abel's sacrifice, but it never says this explicitly. Sometimes a silence in the Torah is revealing. In this case, it suggests that the concern is not Cain's immediate motive, but rather the deeper, essential fact of sibling rivalry. Everyone with children learns that it is not the specific content of their fights that matters so much as the fact of the fight. The issue is the existence of the sibling. As the first humans to have a sibling, Cain and Abel are the archetypes for sibling rivalry. The whole world was Cain's until Abel came along.

9. The Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper [watchman—REF]?"

10. Then He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's bloods cry out [your brother's blood is crying—REF] to Me from the ground! [is shrieking to me from the ground—CS]

11. Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground [damned be you from the soil—EF], which opened its mouth to receive your brother's bloods from your hand.

12. If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth." [wavering and wandering must you be—EF; a roamer and rover in the earth—REF; a rootless wanderer on the earth—CS]

[NS] 9. **Where. . .?** As in Genesis 3.9, the question is a means of opening the conversation, perhaps eliciting confession and contrition. The implication is either that Cain at once fled the scene of his crime or that he immediately buried his victim.

I do not know Cain defiantly lies, stifling all conscience and expressing no remorse.

Am I my brother's keeper? The sevenfold stress in this chapter on the obvious fraternal relationship of Cain and Abel emphatically teaches that man is indeed his brother's keeper and that all homicide is fratricide.

10. What have you done? Not a question, but a cry of horror.

Hark Hebrew *kol* is here used as an exclamation. Being singular in number, it cannot be the subject of the following plural verb.

bloods Hebrew *damim* is plural, a usage that, with rare exceptions, appears in a context of bloodshed or bloodguilt. The Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5, so the Targums, takes the plural to include, apart from the blood of the victim, also that of the potential offspring now doomed never to be born: "Whoever takes a single life destroys thereby an entire world."

cries out The Hebrew stem *ts-'-k* has a legal setting. It connotes a plea for help or redress on the part of the victim of some great injustice.

[REF] 4:9. **Am I my brother's watchman?** It is hard to give up the famous English translation, "Am I my brothers keeper?" but I think it is important to convey the continuing play on forms of the word for "watch" (Hebrew *sh-m-r*). Humans had been put in the garden "to watch over it" (2.15), but in the end the cherubs are put there "to watch over" the way to the tree of life (3.24). Now the first human to murder another questions cynically his responsibility to watch out for his brother. The development of this term climaxes when God declares that the promises to Abraham will be upheld, including that "all the nations of the earth will be blessed through your seed because Abraham listened to my voice and kept my watch" (26:4-5). This phrase (which in the Hebrew uses the root *sh-m-r* twice, emphasizing it by using it in the verb and in its object) thereafter becomes a standard expression in the Torah for conveying loyalty to God.

4:10. What have you done? These are the same words that God had said to Cain's mother in the preceding story (3.13). By opening with a question (even if one already knows the answer!) one gives a person a chance to tell the truth and admit to a wrongdoing.

Your brother's blood is crying. Older translations make this "The voice of your brother's blood is crying," but that is wrong. The word for "voice" or "sound" is singular. The word for blood is plural and must therefore be the subject of the plural verb "crying."

13. Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment [my crime—REF] is too great to bear!

14. Since You have banished me this day from the soil, and I must avoid Your presence and become a restless wanderer on earth—anyone who meets me may kill me!"

15. The Lord said to him, "I promise, if anyone kills Cain, sevenfold vengeance shall be taken on him." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, lest anyone who met him should kill him.

[NS] **14. I must avoid Your presence** A crime against another human being is simultaneously a sin against God. The spiritual ties that unite man to his Maker have become severely strained. Cain fears that he can no longer receive God's providential care.
anyone who meets me In the present context of the narrative, this can only be understood to mean that future offspring of Adam and Eve would feel free to exact blood vengeance.
15. The manner in which God responds to Cain is of special interest. The initial Hebrew *lakhen*, here rendered "I promise," frequently introduces a solemn declaration, while the formulation of the reassurance derives from the realm of law.
The unusually emphatic language is directed first to Cain, in order to allay his mortal fear, and then to the world at large, as a kind of royal proclamation that has the force of law. It states that despite his crime, Cain still remains under God's care.
sevenfold Saadiah, Bekhor Shor, and Radak [Rabbi David Kimchi] take this simply as a figure of speech meaning "abundantly" or "severely." Others take the number literally, meaning that seven of the assailant's family would be killed or that vengeance would continue to the seventh generation.
vengeance This is one of the few passages in which the biblical Hebrew stem *n-k-m* has its primitive meaning of exacting revenge. Otherwise, it has the sense of redressing the imbalance of justice.
a mark This phrase has been persistently misunderstood. The reference is not to a stigma of infamy ["the Mark of Cain" is considered a mark of shame], but to a sign indicating that the bearer is under divine protection. Hebrew *'ot* here probably involves some external physical mark, perhaps on the forehead, as in Ezekiel 9.4-6, serving the same function as the blood of the paschal lamb smeared on the lintels and doorposts of each Israelite house in Egypt. It is also possible, though less likely, that the "sign" consists of some occurrence that serves to authenticate the divine promise as being inviolable. In that case, the text would be rendered: "The Lord gave Cain a [confirmatory] sign that no one who met him would kill him."

16. Cain left the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod [wandering OJPS and EF; roving—REF; Land of Nomads—CS], east of Eden.

17. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he then founded a city, and named the city after his son Enoch.

[NS] THE GENEALOGY OF CAIN (vv. 17–22)

The first killing has taken place, and justice has been done. A human life has been extinguished, but life must go on. Humankind proliferates. Cain and his descendants are now listed, seven generations in all. The genealogy is linear, with only the first-born mentioned until the seventh generation; then the list becomes segmented, and more than one branch is included. Brief narrative material about the development of the arts of civilization is interspersed throughout the list. It is possible that at one time all the names were associated in popular traditions with stories about their achievements. The Torah has chosen to highlight only a few.

The list constitutes a silent polemic against the mythological concepts of the ancient world, which attributed the advance of culture to divine or semidivine figures. Mesopotamian tradition knew of the seven Apkallu, or mythical sages, half-fish and half-man, who rose out of the sea to reveal to man the sciences, the social system, writing and art. Enki-Ea, god of watery chaos, was closely associated with magic, wisdom, the arts and crafts, and music. For Egyptians, Osiris taught humans agriculture and the arts of life; Ptah was the special patron of artists, artificers, and men of letters. In the Ugaritic-Phoenician area, the god Koshar, the divine artisan and smith, was credited with the discovery of the use of iron and fishing tackle. In the Greek sphere, Athena invented the plough and the rake and who taught both the useful and the elegant arts, while Apollo founded towns and invented the flute and the lyre.

This phenomenon, known as euhemerism or the divinization of the benefactors of humanity, was common to the ancient world. In this chapter it is tacitly rejected. The development of human culture is demythologized and historicized. The seven-day divine creation of the cosmos is paralleled by these seven generations of human creativity. Man became a copartner with God in the world of creation. At the same time, the ascription of the origins of technology and urban life to Cain and his line constitute an unfavorable, or at least a qualified, judgment of man's material progress on the part of the Narrator, a recognition that it frequently outruns moral progress and that human ingenuity, so potentially beneficial, is often directed toward evil ends. The line of Cain is not mentioned again in the Bible. No details are given of his span of life, and even the fact of his death is not noted. The same is true of the list of his descendants. The entire line passes into oblivion.

17. his wife A tradition mentioned in Jubilees 4.9 and BT Sanhedrin 58b has Cain marrying his sister. Actually, in the present narrative context no other possibility exists.

Enoch The basic meaning of the stem *ch-n-kh* has to do with initiation, dedication, and education. Thus the name may be symbolic, signifying the regeneration of life.

he then founded a city He was the founder of urban culture. The soil, being accursed and unproductive for Cain, is put to use by him for wholly new purposes. This notice exhibits a consciousness of the importance and prominence of the city as a political and social unit. The notion that the farmer originated the city is consistent with the fact that the rise of urban centers historically followed in the wake of the development of agriculture.

The association of Cain with settled urban existence seems to contradict his fated life of vagrancy. Accordingly, the Narrator must have had in mind that the city served his son, not Cain himself. For another suggestion, see Comment to verse 18.

18. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad begot M'chuyael, and M'chiyael begot M'tusael, and M'tusael begot Lamech.

19. Lamech took to himself two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other was Zillah.

20. Adah bore Yaval; he was the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and amidst herds.

21. And the name of his brother was Yuval; he was the ancestor of all who play the lyre [harp—OJPS; lute—CS] and the pipe [the long flute—CS; NOTE: A lyre is a stringed instrument like a small U-shaped harp with strings fixed to a crossbar]

22. As for Zillah, she bore Tubal-cain, who forged all implements of copper and iron [the forger of every cutting instrument of brass and iron—OJPS; burnisher of every blade of bronze and iron—EF; who forged every tool of copper and iron—RA]. And the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

[NS] 18. Lamech A similar word in Arabic means "a strong young man."

19. Lamech is apparently the first polygamist, though his two wives are identified only in order to make the following poem intelligible. It is uncertain whether the ascription of polygamy to a descendant of Cain is meant to be a tacit condemnation of the institution.

Adah…Zillah The names may respectively mean "dawn" and "dusk," the first being connected with Arabic *ghadāt*, the second with Hebrew *ts-l-l*, "shade." Adah may also derive from Hebrew *'adi*, a "jewel," and Zillah from Hebrew *ts-l-l*, "to tingle." This name would then be the equivalent of the modern English name Melody.

The seventh natural-born generation comprises three brothers, and to each of them a major advance in material culture is attributed. By this time, labor has become still more specialized, and an artisan class has arisen.

An intriguing question is the reason for highlighting only the three ingredients of civilization mentioned here. The similarity of sound between the three personal names and the common fatherhood suggests a closeness of relationship between the pastoral, musical and metalworking arts, which in fact is well founded. The name Cain, which means a "smith," also means "to sing" in several Semitic languages, though Hebrew *kinah* is restricted to mournful song. The Cypriot god Cinyras, to whom was attributed the invention of the lyre, was revered by the Greeks both as a musician and as the archetypal smith. Pan, Greek god of flocks and shepherds, was the inventor of the flute. Similarly, Apollo, the deity who protected flocks and cattle, was also the god of song and music, and still another tradition has Hermes, god of shepherds, as inventor of the lyre.

23. And Lamech said to his wives,

   "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
   O wives of Lamech, give ear to my speech.
   I have slain a man for wounding me,
   And a lad for bruising me.
24. If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
   Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."

[NS] THE SONG OF LAMECH (vv. 23–24)

This is the first true example of biblical Hebrew poetic style. It possesses neither meter nor rhyme in the present sense of these terms, but it does have an undeniable rhythmic quality. Its essential formal characteristic is "parallelism," that is, the featuring of a couplet in which the second line may restate the thought of the first in different words, as here, may supplement it, may be antithetical to it, or may be climactic. The parallelism of the Song of Lamech is illustrated as follows:

Clause a	Clause b
Adah and Zillah	wives of Lamech
hear	give ear
my voice	my speech
a man	a lad
for wounding me	for bruising me
Cain	Lamech
sevenfold	seventy-sevenfold

The Song of Lamech probably originally belonged to a larger poetic composition about the exploits of this hero, and the inclusion of this here serves several purposes. First, it forms an envelope structure that enables the genealogy to end as it begins, with mention of Cain, thus linking the genealogy to the preceding episode. Moreover, the lust for revenge exhibited by Lamech is a lamentable commentary on the moral state of *homo faber* [creative man].

Because of the brevity of the poem and the loss of its original context, the interpretation of the verses is uncertain. An attractive suggestion is that they constitute Lamech's taunts, threats and boastings, which are of the kind customarily uttered in ancient times by those about to engage in combat. The story of David and Goliath, as told in 1 Samuel 17, especially verses 10, 36, and 43-46, is an excellent biblical example of this genre. Alternatively, Lamech may be describing some incident that has already taken place in which he actually shed blood to avenge a previously inflicted wound. The translation of the tenses of the verbs in verse 23 will, of course, be affected by the interpretation adopted.

23. a man. . . a lad Such a pair in parallelism is unique. If the two are synonymous here, then Hebrew *yeled*, usually a "child," is to be understood as derogatory: "This man, my antagonist, is but a mere child in combat!" The two nouns could also express degree, as in verse 24. Lamech boasts of recognizing no restraints in exacting revenge.

for wounding me In this and its parallel term the Hebrew suffix could be either objective, as here, or subjective, in the sense of, "My mere wounding/bruising of my combatant is fatal."

25. Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth *[shet; granted one—EF]*, meaning, "God has provided *[shaht; granted me—RA]* me with another offspring in place of Abel," for Cain had killed him.

26. And to Seth, in turn, a son was born, and he named him Enosh. It was then that men began to invoke the Lord by name.

25-26. Seth . . . Enosh The name Seth is here connected with the stem *sh-y-t*, "to place, put, set." The birth of Seth compensates for the loss of Abel. Since the noun shat means "foundation," as in Isaiah 19.10 and Psalm 11.3, there may lie behind the name the notion that, as Numbers Rabba 14.20 has it, "With him the world was founded [anew]." It is probably no coincidence that Seth, in turn, named his son Enosh, which, like Adam, means "man" but which puts the emphasis on the basic frailty of man because the stem *'-n-sh* means "to be weak."

2**6. men began to invoke the Lord by name** Prayer, as noted above, is seen as a development independent of sacrifice. It is the consciousness of human frailty, symbolized by the name Enosh, that heightens man's awareness of utter dependence upon God, a situation that intuitively evokes prayer. The coupling of prayer with the divine proper name Adonai is understandable because this name, the simplest interpretation of which is "He Who Causes To Be," expresses God's personality, His relationship to humans, His immanence in the world.

This text takes monotheism to be the original religion of the human race, and the knowledge of the name Adonai to be pre-Abrahamic. In conformity with this notion, Adonai is freely used throughout the patriarchal narratives.

On the other hand, it is significant that of all the proper names listed in the Torah, none is constructed of the divine element based on this name, whether prefixed *yeho/yo* or suffixed *yahu/yah*, until the birth of Moses. Yocheved, the Hebrew name of Moses' mother, is the first such. This accords with the tradition of Exodus 3:13-16 and 6:3, which clearly implies that the divine name Adonai only came to prominence as the characteristic personal name of the God of Israel in the time of Moses. It was only then that the people as a whole experienced the essential character of God as it revealed itself through His direct intervention in history.