

From Bad to Worse...

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[0 : 0 0] Great, yeah, we're carrying on in these early and these fundamental chapters of Genesis. We've been taking things fairly slowly so far. There's a lot crammed in to these opening chapters.

But actually, you might have noticed perhaps that certainly in chapters 2 and 3, the pace of the narrative of the story unfolding has been going fairly slowly as well.

A lot has happened. But if you think of it, by the end of chapter 2, at the start of chapter... Sorry, by the end of chapter 3, at the start of chapter 4 here, we're still dealing with the first generation of humanity.

We're still dealing with the first people, with Adam and Eve. And this morning in chapter 4, the pace here really just picks up a little bit. And by the end of these verses, we are seven or eight generations in.

And what we're seeing here is the world of Genesis 2 and 3 being worked out and developed over time through history from generation to generation.

[1 : 0 0] It's a bit like a... I don't know if anyone here enjoys a marble run or has got kids that enjoy those. You know, you set that up at the beginning. It takes a lot of time. It's a bit of a faff. You know, these chapters here have kind of set the scene.

And that's included the problems that have been worked in. Most notably, of course, the problem of sin that has entered God's creation, that the perfection of Genesis 2 has been tainted in Genesis chapter 3.

But with that all being built, chapter 4 is as if we kind of set the ball rolling and we see how that all works out. Or we could think of it like the foundations have been laid.

What was perfect in Genesis chapter 2 has had some cracks appear in Genesis chapter 3. But now the house is going to be built on top of that. And we're going to see what that looks like, the effects of that down the line as time passes.

This chapter is really a family tree or a genealogy, as they're often called in the Bible. Lots of names, hard names to pronounce. You can ask James about those later on. But three particular people who stand out in this chapter, those are Cain, who gets a lot of focus at the start.

[2 : 1 5] Lamech, who gets a lot of airtime in the middle. And then Seth, who kind of wraps things up at the end. And we're going to look at those three in turn, what they show us about the unfolding of a perfect creation that's tainted with sin, working itself out throughout history.

And obviously joining the dots to see how that affects our world and the way that we live in it as well. So as we said, the first major character highlighted here is Cain.

And we see Cain's tragic interaction with his brother Abel. And what we see here developing, flowing from the incredibly significant events of chapter 3, really is human nature.

And in particular, human nature in terms of its opposition to God. Just one generation after the first sin, we have the first murder.

Cain kills his brother Abel. And there are lots of parallels in these chapters between Cain's sin in chapter 4 and Adam and Eve's sin back in chapter 3.

[3 : 24] But in each case, it's like the volume has just been turned up that little bit louder. So in chapter 3, the disobedience is eating the fruit. In chapter 4, it's committing murder.

In chapter 3, Adam and Eve have to be tempted into the sin by the serpent. In chapter 4, Cain sins despite the warning that God gives him.

In chapter 3, when God questions Adam after his sin, Adam gives kind of excuses as to why he did it. Here in chapter 4, when God questions Cain, he answers with outright lies.

Verse 9, Where is your brother Abel? God asked. I do not know, Cain said, having just killed him in the field. And so there are similarities here in the pattern of sin.

But here in chapter 4, it is amplified. One commentator speaks about this development. It says, sin is more firmly entrenched and humanity further alienated from God.

[4 : 26] What we're seeing here is that seed of sin planted in the garden that begins to take roots and begins to grow. Human nature, sinful nature, developing in opposition to God.

And it is in, as we said there, opposition to God. Before it's in opposition to Abel, even though it's Abel who will end up dead here, it's the opposition to God that comes first.

In verses 3 and 4, Cain and Abel both bring offerings to God. And yet God, we read, accepts only Abel's. And that is down to Cain's attitude toward God.

Why did God reject Cain's offering? It's not an arbitrary choice by God. It's not, as some people have suggested, that God wanted an animal sacrifice rather than something from the land.

And Abel happened to be a shepherd, whereas Cain was kind of an arable farmer. Later on in the Bible, God does prescribe kind of grain offerings, things from the land. There's nothing wrong with that type of offering.

[5 : 28] I know the problem here, as we said, is the attitude behind the offering, as it reveals Cain's attitude to God himself. There's a couple of clues here in these verses.

Have a look at verse 3. It says, Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground. But that's contrasted with Abel in verse 4, who we read brought of the firstborn of the flock and of their fat portions.

Abel is shown to be bringing the very best that he has to God, while Cain is just sort of bringing something. It's that difference in attitude toward God which makes the difference.

And that's backed up in the New Testament, in the book of Hebrews. We read that by faith, Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous.

God commended him by accepting his gifts. Abel was a man who came to God by faith. He displayed that faith by offering his very best as he recognized his dependence on and allegiance to God.

[6 : 39] Well, Cain, we read, didn't have that faith. Cain made that sort of token effort, but really with his heart not in it. And we see that development in that growing distance then between man and God, and also the growing distance between those with faith in God, like Abel, and those like Cain without.

Again, following on from last week, what we're seeing here being worked out through the generations, it is that line of the serpent, those who would oppose God, and that line of Eve, those with faith in God.

God had said there would always be this conflict. We see the results of this conflict here as Cain kills Abel. We see here that as humanity grows away from God, it also grows away from one another.

And in a lot of ways, the Bible's application to us today of this passage is fairly simple. Again, the New Testament picks up the lesson of this story as the Apostle John writes to the church.

He says, This is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one, and murdered his brother.

[7 : 54] And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil, and his brother's righteous. Again, John pointing out there that it's as we fail in our commitment to God, as we fail to come to him with the faith of Abel offering our best, we see that that brings hostility in our relationships with one another as well.

The vertical us and God affects the horizontal us and one another. And perhaps you might be sitting there this morning thinking, Well, I'm not going to go and kill anyone, and I'll take your word for that.

I'm sure you're right. But actually, the principle for us this morning remains the same. That as we get further from God, we get further from one another.

And we see that today in so much of the breakdown in society around us. We see that, don't we, in the polarization of our world. Where everything is kind of this camp against that camp, and there's no kind of generosity or eagerness to listen.

We see that, as we've already prayed about, in war, which is such a permanent fixture in our news. Lots of other examples where we could think about where there is this division, where there is this lack of love.

[9 : 09] And we see that on the big scale in our world. Again, it fits with, it explains the world that we live in when we look in these early chapters of Genesis.

But we also see that in our lives as well. The issue here is not all just out there. Because all of us need to hear that warning that God gives Cain, that if our relationship with him, if our relationship with God isn't right, when we have that self-righteousness that says, actually, I don't need God, rather than that faith of Abel, which depends on him, that we need to hear that same warning of verse 7, just the same first, that sin is crouching at the door, God says.

It desires to have us, such a powerful image. You can kind of imagine that the lioness, ready to pounce, ready to take advantage of any weakness or separation.

God says, that is the danger as we stray from him, that sin longs to get its claws into us. Sin wants to take our self-righteousness and use it to put others down.

You know, can you believe that person did that? I would never do something like that. Can you believe it? Sin wants to take our pride and use it to set us against one another, where the whole of life is a competition, where our value, our worth is found from being elevated above other people and putting them down beneath us.

[10 : 40] Sin wants to ultimately take our hostility toward God and use that to make us despise those who are made in his image, just as it did with Cain.

It's no surprise that Jesus himself, when asked, what is the greatest commandment, he answers really with two answers because they're inseparable. He says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the great and first commandment and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Again, that love for God and love for people come together.

We see from the start here of Genesis 4 the reverse of that as well, that the distance from God and hostility toward others come together too. And yet even here there's actually this picture of God's mercy.

Even as Cain is sent away in that judgment, God still promises that he will protect him. But the message kind of ringing in our ears here as we get to the end of this section on Cain are those words of the Apostle John, we should not be like Cain but rather come to God in faith as Abel did so that even in a world where through sin hostility toward God and one another grows and grows and grows that actually we can be those people who love God and as we find our security in him and his love for us are then able to love one another.

[12:07] And that means that in the church as we gather as people who are connected by what God has done for us we should also be able to be a picture of that restoration that unity that undoing of sin and its consequences that the world so desperately needs and is looking for.

That as the church as we love God we would love one another. So there's Cain we see the start of this family tree we see human nature in its opposition to God developing we see the consequences of that a real warning there and then from verse 17 things speed up a little bit we race through a few generations as if the fast forward button is pressed and then it's with Lamech that we hit play again and we focus in to see a little bit more how the events of Genesis 3 are working themselves out further down the line and one thing is obvious isn't it things have got worse.

If Cain was bad in Lamech that wickedness has become even more overt to the fact where he boasts in his violence his misogyny his vindictiveness.

Verse 23 Lamech said to his wives 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 77 fold you think Cain was bad I'm worse Lamech proudly boasts and in that way we see it's more of the same really of what we've seen with Cain it wasn't just that Cain was a kind of a bad apple there is this downward trajectory through these generations distance from God and hostility to others displayed again it's pretty grim but then in the middle of this section the middle of this section on Lamech there is something that really surprises us I think that we see here alongside that we're told about Lamech's sons part of this wicked line of the serpent that is being traced but we're also told that from them comes what we would call human progress or development we see the development of human culture in this second section and so verse 20 we have Jabel who develops kind of farming really

Jubal the first musician Tubal Cain these are cracking names aren't they he develops kind of metal work right there in this time of moral descent that we've looked at right here in the line of the serpent that we've spoken about we have these great areas of human development we actually see despite what we might expect we see culture advancing and so what are we then to make of this is this telling us okay well cultural development civilization technology in all its forms music these are bad things look they are the result of sin they're part of the line of this monster Lamech we need to steer well clear of all of that stuff is that the point that's certainly an attitude at the times that the church has kind of adopted but actually that can't be the case because what is happening here this human progress this culture is the work that God has actually called humanity to before the fall and remember back in Genesis chapter 1 just as God had created man and woman he gave them what's often called the cultural mandate

[15 : 59] Genesis 1 28 it says and God blessed them and God said to them be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over you know human development human progress is part of God's purpose for humanity that they were never supposed to just keep the earth as they found it but to work it to develop it to subdue it remember again if you can the very end of the Bible the end of Revelation that we looked at last week we spoke about how there are so many parallels between the Garden of Eden and what we see at the end of Revelation chapter 20 but actually it's not exactly the same it's not a return to a garden in Revelation chapter 20 what is described is a garden city there's been development there's been progress and that still stands as we saw last week sin doesn't prevent God's plans but it does cast a shadow over them and it does taint them and so what we're seeing here really in these verses are two things firstly cause for celebration that God still uses humanity but also cause for caution it's like everything else we now live in this entwined world where things are not black and white where the developing good that humanity is tasked with is now intertwined with the developing evil that we see in these verses okay so this might all sound a little bit convoluted or abstract what are we actually talking about here let's think about that because this has some really practical really day to day consequences on how we think about and how we interact with the world around us so let's do that by taking an example that is given here in the passage the example of music we're told here that that begins with Jubal son of Lamech now knowing his kind of family background we can be pretty confident his first tune was not

Amazing Grace or Kumbaya or anything else along those lines it was not a song of praise to God and yet we can't therefore say well because it comes from this bad source music is bad because actually the Bible is full of music to the glory of God the church is commanded to sing psalms hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in our hearts to God it's one of the joys of when we gather on a Sunday that we're able to do that together and also music doesn't have to be Christian to be good music to have real beauty to be part of humanity cultivating the world in a way that reflects God's beauty and so whatever your taste in music might be I'm sure you'd be able to think of some incredible pieces of music that make our world a better place that point in some way to the beauty of a good creator and so we have to say a music is a good thing a good gift from God to be used for his glory and yet at the same time we're all fully aware aren't we there is plenty of music that pushes in the opposite direction there's plenty of music that glorifies an entirely godless or even anti-God approach to life there is plenty of music that teaches and disciplines people into certain habits or patterns or ways of seeing the world that are not good that are very much from the Lamech school of thought of power domination violence rather than shaping us in ways that look to God you know

I know personally there are albums which I always used to enjoy but which I just knew I had to stop listening to because I could feel how they unhelpfully shaped my attitudes and approaches in certain areas of life the point that we're to get here from Genesis chapter 4 is that we now need wisdom because things are not just black and white and that's kind of harder for us isn't it because black and white is easier than actually having to think just to say we'll take all of this and we'll reject all of that that's simpler this passage is telling us that it's not the world that we live in but actually to live well means making good choices how we interact with culture which is really just everything I suppose that makes up the world around us requires wisdom and not complete retreat because actually cultural development is part of God's plan it was part of his task given to humanity but neither just unthinking complete acceptance because as we see here in this passage sin is mingled into these things and there's an almost infinite number of things we could apply this to we just looked at music and that's something kind of specific in this passage and also something we probably hear day to day but we could go on listing things all morning couldn't we sports agriculture medicine airplanes mobile phones any human development you can think of fits into this framework this passage shows us that because of the shape of creation and fall and the way the world has unfolded from that that we need to interact with all these things with wisdom and so we don't separate ourselves from anything not specifically

Christian partly because that's impossible to do anyway but more significantly because those are part of God's mandate for humanity to subdue to have dominion to develop sin has not stopped God's plans or purposes but at the same time as we said we don't swing to the other extreme and accept everything the world offers to its full extent because we recognize well these things are tainted to some degree we need wisdom to take what is good and to reject what is bad and actually a really good exercise I think that all of us could think about over the coming week is just to take an aspect of life something very day to day something which is part of the culture that we live in and consider well what is the good what is the God glorifying way that that could be used but also what are the dangers where we see sin entangled in those areas how can those areas end up leading us away from

God or seek to try and replace God and with those two things in mind having thought carefully about that well how does that shape how we interact with that aspect of life this passage wants us to be wise in how we engage with the world around us again it's giving us that incredibly realistic picture of the world that we live in and as we think about that then there's one thing that this passage makes abundantly clear which is that this progress in all different areas of human life human culture human technology this mix of good and not good that as they're tangled in here with the line of the serpent the descendants of Lamech we see one thing really clearly that ultimately none of these human developments are going to be the thing that saves us none of them are going to be the thing that will put everything right again none no areas of human efforts are going to be bringing us back to the perfection of Eden and so none of them are where we should put our ultimate trust even though they often promise so much true wisdom recognizes the good from the evil it chooses wisely how to interact but it also recognizes that none of these things are what will ultimately save us and that then leads us to our final name emphasized in this chapter where we see the hope of what will this name emphasized not by an extended narrative of events like it was with Cain or Lamech but emphasized instead really by a kind of change in time a reset as having worked down the generations of this family tree having seen the development of humanity but also the development of sin and the rejection of God at the close of this chapter it stops and it goes back to the beginning again as we return to another child of Eve verse 25 we have this kind of reset almost and Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and called his name Seth for she said

[24 : 38] 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 this chapter has been this downward slide hasn't it things getting worse from Adam through Cain to Lamech and yet here we see the end of the chapter that this is not the end of the story that Abel who trusted in God Abel who had faith who offered that better sacrifice Abel was killed but God provides another offspring in his place the line of Eve from which God had promised a victor remember a serpent crusher one who was going to destroy the work of devil and the evil that had brought into the world although God will not let that line fail God provides Seth

Seth has a son Enosh and that closing line with incredible hope there at that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord that hope that as sin grows as humanity spirals as people grow further from God and further from one another that still people are able to call upon the name of the Lord and that hope then is expanded throughout the Bible as we see that when we do call upon his name that God saves that what all human development advanced and technology is unable to do God has done in the New Testament it's through Seth it's through Enosh it's this family line that is traced all the way to Jesus we see in this passage that that for everything that is good in our world but it will not save everything that is tangled up in the line of the serpent but there is this line of Eve that goes straight to the rescuer that we need

God provides the solution through Jesus so that when we come to him in faith as Abel made his sacrifice to God in faith we see that we can be forgiven we can have our greatest need met which is that we can be brought back to the God who created us and again as we are brought back to God heals and helps us with our relationships with others as well we see that actually Jesus himself on the cross is that perfect sacrifice made for us so that through trusting in him we can be brought into his people because of the promise that God has kept these verses this chapter as we've seen so many times in these opening chapters of Genesis they're here to help us understand the world that we live in they're here to be real about how we deal with other people and how we can expect other people to deal with us they're here to help us understand our world's attitude to God and how that shapes where we live they're here to help us understand how we can interact with our world our culture in incredibly practical ways to live out that wisdom but in all that they're here most of all to point us to

Jesus as the hope that we have that we would call on his name and that we would know the rescue that he offers that we would know for certain that God will keep his promise of rescue that promise that he made back in the garden that promise that we see will not be stopped here in Genesis 4 as that line of Eve continues and does that all the way through to Jesus that promise of forgiveness of restoration of all things made new as God provides the saviour we need and as we find our hope in him let's pray together and for that come show to