

THE NOT-SO-GREAT SOCIETY

GENESIS 4:17-26 AUGUST 11, 2021

How do you make a “great” society? Of course, in the last few years the idea of making America great again has been discussed at length. Some may be surprised to learn that “Make America great again” was not a new idea. Ronald Reagan’s 1980 campaign slogan was, “Let’s make America great again.”¹ He just didn’t think to put it on hats. We can go back before the Reagan era to Lyndon Johnson who had his ambitious plan for the “Great Society.”² In his now famous commencement speech at the University Of Michigan in 1964, Johnson said, “...*we have the opportunity to move not only toward the rich society and the powerful society, but upward to the Great Society...It is a place where the city of man serves not only the needs of the body and the demands of commerce but the desire for beauty and the hunger for community.*”³

Human beings want greatness for themselves and for their societies. There have been many approaches and yet so many fall short or create terrible unintended consequences in their pursuit of greatness. In that same speech President Johnson lamented: “*It is harder and harder to live the good life in American cities today.*”

Why is that? That’s been true of almost every place in every generation, including our own. Well, as we’ve seen in the opening chapters of Genesis, God had set up mankind for *great* things, but we stumbled out of the gate. The Lord got us back up on our feet, but now we were hobbled by sin. Fast forward a few years and we see Cain murdering his brother. As a society, we were not off to a great start. And yet, God was gracious and long-suffering. As always, He offered a way that people might have access to Him and find fulfillment. But, as is true today, He would not *force* anyone to go His way. Human beings had and still have a true free will to either believe God or reject Him.

As Genesis chapter 4 closes, we see the people of earth building cities, inventing things, designing systems. They’re spreading into different careers and writing and creating art. (*This record is an affront, by the way, to the idea that early man was some sort of grunting cave dweller. Far from it - these first inhabitants of earth had marvelous intelligence, ingenuity and resourcefulness.*)

As the population grows and busies itself, God not only keeps a record of it, but He also shows a very clear distinction to us. Once sin was in the picture we find that there are only two types of people in the world: Those who have faith in God and those who don’t. These two distinct groups were epitomized by Cain and Abel. Though there was a lot of different activity and opportunity and all sorts of new horizons humans were discovering, all of that could be stripped away and there was one thing left: Did a person *believe* God? *That* difference was profound, not only in how a person thought and behaved but the outcomes that arrived as a result.

Interestingly, God did *not* let those who had faith in Him back into the Garden of Eden. Instead, these two groups would all live alongside one another in the world. But, all along, from the time of Abel all the way through to our own day and age, there would exist what some have called “two humanities.”⁴ In some ways they appear very similar. After all, they mingle together and use many of the same tools, but look a bit closer and you find the foundations, the progress and the end results are *very* different. These two humanities are on exhibit in the second half of Genesis 4.

¹ <https://www.businessinsider.com/memorable-presidential-campaign-slogans-and-why-they-worked#ronald-reagan-1980-lets-make-america-great-again-6>

² <https://www.history.com/topics/1960s/great-society>

³ <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-university-michigan>

⁴ Francis Schaeffer *Genesis In Space And Time*

Genesis 4:17a - ¹⁷ Cain was intimate with his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch.

Perhaps you've heard the old question: Where did Cain get his wife? The answer is simple: She was his sister. Our modern ears cringe at that for a couple of reasons. First, we don't *do* relative marriage anymore in our society. But, marrying a family member was a common occurrence up until the second half of the 20th century. Albert Einstein's wife, Elsa, was his cousin on *both* sides of his family.⁵ Rudy Giuliani was married to his second cousin for 14 years.⁶ Then there's Philip II of Spain. He was married 4 times - to three cousins and a niece.⁷

Of course today we recognize the genetic danger of marrying someone you're related to. So how could our ancient forefathers have done so without great damage to their offspring? Well, we see the long lifespans and recognize that the corruption of sin wasn't as profound as it became after the flood and into later millennia. As one commentator put it, you wouldn't want to drink water from the Hudson River in New York City, but if you travelled all the way back to the source in the Adirondacks to the shimmering Lake Tear Of The Clouds which feeds it, you'd find pristine water.

Genesis 4:17b - Then Cain became the builder of a city, and he named the city Enoch after his son.

How could there be enough people to build a city? It's impossible to know what the population of the world was leading up to the flood, but the number was almost certainly more than we'd expect. We're thinking of two people with their two boys. But Adam and Eve had more than Cain and Abel. They had other sons and daughters. And the people at this time lived for 700, 800, 900 years. The diseases and wars that cut down so many humans *after* the flood and into our own era weren't an issue then. Women could have children not for 30 or 40 years, but more than ten times that length! Think about this: When Jacob's family came to Egypt they were 70 persons. 400 years later, after enduring *genocide*, they left Egypt with a minimum of 600,000.⁸ It was probably more like 1 or 2 million.

Since the year 1800 we have added 6 billion people to the earth's population.⁹ The BBC wrote about how NASA and others are discussing population growth since we're talking about colonizing other planets like Mars. Their assessment after speaking with experts was that a planet's population could grow from one couple to 7 billion in 557 years.¹⁰ That's not even 60% of Adam's lifespan! The folks at *Answers In Genesis* calculate that, if the population growth rate was the *same* as it was in the year 2,000, the earth would've been home to 750,000,000 at the time of the flood.¹¹

So, here we see Cain has a son named Enoch. No, it's not the Enoch we know and love. *He* will be a descendant of Cain's brother, Seth.

Now, last time we saw that God had pronounced that Cain would be a wanderer over the earth, finding no rest and no home. What do we see now? He's wandered a bit, but he's building a city. We

⁵ Walter Isaacson *Einstein: His Life And Universe*

⁶ https://blogs.ancestry.com/cm/9-famous-people-who-married-their-cousins/?utm_source=pocket_mylist

⁷ https://www.toptenz.net/10-historical-figures-who-had-incestuous-marriages.php?utm_source=pocket_mylist

⁸ Exodus 12:37

⁹ https://www.npr.org/2011/10/31/141816460/visualizing-how-a-population-grows-to-7-billion?utm_source=pocket_mylist

¹⁰ https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20160113-could-just-two-people-repopulate-earth?utm_source=pocket_mylist

¹¹ <https://answersingenesis.org/noahs-ark/pre-flood-population/>

don't need to think in large scale - linguists indicate it might have just been a fortified encampment with multiple buildings - but in this action we see more of Cain's hardheartedness toward God. He's attempting to *defy* God again. "God said I'd wander, well I'm gonna plant myself right here." In fact, in a way he's putting himself in the place of God. He names his boy Enoch and makes this city, names it after him, effectively saying, "I'm God. I'm the decider. I'm making my own 'garden' for you, my creation, to dwell in." This is the mindset and the culture that Cain is establishing for his society.

Genesis 4:18 - ¹⁸ Irad was born to Enoch, Irad fathered Mehujael, Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech.

These weren't all the kids each of these families had. God is zooming in on a particular line so that it can compare to the particular line from Adam through Seth which will ultimately lead to the Messiah, the Promised Seed who will save us from the power of sin and restore creation once and for all.

Each of these fellows had the same responsibility toward God *and* the same opportunity to discover Him and believe in Him. Adam was still alive. In fact, Adam lived long enough to see nine generations down, all the way to Noah's father!¹² Any son of Cain could've gone to their great grandfather and heard him speak about the Lord. We'll find that the origin of the mark of Cain was known at least to the seventh generation. And so, all of these guys were without excuse.

Genesis 4:19 - ¹⁹ Lamech took two wives for himself, one named Adah and the other named Zillah.

The first "poster child" of American marketing was Donald Eugene Anderson, whose picture was put on a March of Dimes campaign in their fight against Polio.¹³ "According to the original meaning of the term, a [poster] child [is one who is] afflicted by some disease or deformity," put on display in an attempt to raise awareness or funds for the fight against the disease.¹⁴

Here, the text zooms in on a particular poster child afflicted with sin, Lamech. Of course, he wasn't a boy, he was a grown man. And he was a bad man who not only gave into sin, but reveled in it and allowed it to rule him.

Sin ruled his family. He's the first recorded polygamist. Though many criticize the Bible and suggest it approves of polygamy, that isn't true. The facts are stated but not endorsed. From the beginning God established marriage as one biological male and one biological female living in a dedicated, monogamous relationship as long as both lived. Polygamy is *not* presented in a positive light in the Scriptures, much to the contrary.

We're told that Lamech "took" his wives. Based off of the meanings of his wives' names, we infer that he did so because of superficial reasons, not substantive ones.

But think about this: Lamech *took* his wives, but God *brought* Eve to Adam. She was a gift, specially designed to pair with him in just the right way. You who are *single* people of God, don't just *take* a spouse. God has one in mind for you. And, in the Bible, when God's people try to do Him a favor and find a spouse of their own, the result is disaster.

¹² https://viz.bible/visualizing-the-genesis-timeline-from-adam-to-abraham/?utm_source=pocket_mylist

¹³ https://www.marchofdimes.org/news/in-memoriam-donald-anderson-first-poster-child-1940-2014.aspx?utm_source=pocket_mylist

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poster_child

Think about it this way: The Bible says that God establishes our steps,¹⁵ that He has allotted the number of our days,¹⁶ that He has marked out our time and boundaries,¹⁷ that He has custom made a path of life, full of good works for us to discover and walk in.¹⁸ Do you not think that He has a particular person in mind to give you in that most significant relationship of your life? He does. Wait on the Lord and allow Him to *bring* you together with your spouse.

Before learning more about Lamech we get to meet his kids.

Genesis 4:20-22 - ²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the first of the nomadic herdsmen. ²¹ His brother was named Jubal; he was the first of all who play the lyre and the flute. ²² Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. Tubal-cain's sister was Naamah.

None of these are recorded as believers, and yet they were significant contributors to earth's culture and industry. We *still* follow in their footsteps today. On one level, their accomplishments are remarkable. But ultimately their *individual* lives lacked eternal weight.

That doesn't mean all of earth's culture or commodities are evil. I play guitar because Jubal invented a lyre. But when a life isn't founded and fed by faith in God, by His directing Word, then that life is ultimately wasted. And, when a culture doesn't find its source and motivation in the grace of God, it will inevitably allow selfishness and corruption to flood in and contaminate it. That spiritual principle is demonstrated for us by Lamech.

Genesis 4:23-24 - ²³ Lamech said to his wives: Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, pay attention to my words. For I killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me. ²⁴ If Cain is to be avenged seven times over, then for Lamech it will be seventy-seven times!

One of my all-time favorite Bible study insights comes from right here from our own Pastor Jake. He once pointed out that Lamech was the first gangster rapper. It's true! The boasting, the ladies, the violence, the using of your own name - it's all there!

So it seems that lust had perverted his family life. Now we see that pride had driven him to bloodshed. His ancestor Cain had killed in secret, but Lamech did it in the open. He's so full of himself that he boasts in what he did. "What a *great* man I am! What a big man I am! I butchered a lad because he offended me!" It's worth noting that some scholars actually see *two* murders here, not just one.¹⁹ But this was no simple chest thumping. This was an intricate, carefully constructed poem.²⁰ Compare it to the simple poem that had been offered by Adam when he first saw Eve, full of thanks and recognition of God's goodness and excitement for the *life* that would result.

Lamech, here, has become his own moral compass. We see in his song that he's saying, "I'm God now. I do what I want, when I want, to who I want. I take what I want. I'll terrorize my wives and my neighborhood. I decide what is just." The result was violence and death.

¹⁵ Proverbs 16:9

¹⁶ Job 14:5

¹⁷ Acts 17:26-27

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:10

¹⁹ See *Bible Knowledge Commentary* and *CSB Study Bible Notes*

²⁰ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible Notes*

Meanwhile, back at the ranch...

Genesis 4:25 - ²⁵ Adam was intimate with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, for she said, “God has given me another offspring in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.”

In contrast to the individualism and selfishness of Cain’s line we see God’s people thinking very differently. They see the Lord as being involved with each part of their lives, a God mindful of their hurts, a God who will still carry out the promises He made, even when it seems like they had been derailed. Remember - Eve thought that *Cain* was going to be the deliverer and then that all came crashing down. And yet, her faith did not fail. It continued and even grew. She was sorrowful over the loss of her precious Abel, but she was not defeated. Neither should we be when trial or suffering or loss comes our way. God is still God, He is still faithful, He will still do what He has promised.

Genesis 4:26 - ²⁶ A son was born to Seth also, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord.

There’s no descriptor of their jobs. That will be the case all the way down to Noah. As God compares these two humanities, the difference was not in how great their production was, but who their hearts were devoted to. This was the difference: Some began to call on the name of the Lord. In future passages we will see the believers, “found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” or that they “walked with God.” *That* was the difference.

What does it mean that they began to call on the name of the Lord? Some scholars think that they *claimed* God’s name for themselves,²¹ like how we call ourselves Christians. This also indicates that they were *proclaimers* of God’s word. The Bible explains that Seth’s descendant Enoch was a preacher, as was Noah. It also indicates that they established a regular, corporate time of worship.²²

What does it mean to call on the name of the Lord today? To walk with God like these faithful forefathers did?

First and foremost, it means we *believe*. We put our faith in God and His revealed word. That we trust that His way is the way that leads to life and then orient our lives accordingly. It means that we devote ourselves to worship personally *and* corporately. Recognizing that when we come together we don’t do so just out of tradition or to give lip service to some religion, but so that we might come before the majesty of God with an offering of praise and surrender and obedience to Him. To walk with God means that we *do* obey Him in our hearts and our family lives and our pursuits. It means that we focus our minds on what He has said and being *different* from the world we find ourselves in. Different in some profound ways. Like, when the world wants 77x revenge, we’re to choose forgiveness seventy *times* seven.

Meanwhile, when I suffer, when I’m attacked, when I’m in a time of struggle or loss, I can follow the example of Eve and Seth and these others and *choose* to believe God and trust God, the *living* God, who *will* deliver me home to our enduring city. This mindset, this walking with God is what makes life worth it. It’s what makes a life *great* and will make a society *great*. Because it is *righteousness* that exalts a nation.²³ The great society is the one full of faith.

²¹ Francis Schaeffer *Genesis In Space And Time*

²² Henry Morris *The Genesis Record*

²³ Proverbs 14:34