

After moving to the land of Nod, possibly in an attempt to return to the Garden of Eden, we see Cain now unable to re-enter Eden. Therefore, he must find a way to move forward in his new reality. This is a reality where the ground does not yield its strength (v. 12), resulting in him living as "a fugitive and a vagabond" (v. 12).

FIRST WIFE, FIRST GRANDCHILD, FIRST CITY

Verse 17 introduces a series of firsts. Although Cain's wife is not the first woman or wife in the most literal sense, as Eve holds that position, she is the first woman to be a wife in the more traditional sense of growing up, falling in love, and getting married. The text provides very little information about her, sparking countless questions. Apart from various traditions and speculations, we cannot definitively answer the question of who Cain married. If we assume, as I do, that Adam and Eve were the starting point of the human population, and that Cain married a human, we are left to conclude that Cain likely married a close or, given enough time, a more distant family member.

The record of Seth's birth when Adam was 130 years old (Gen. 5:3) gives us some important context. Cain and Abel were adults by the time Seth was even born, suggesting that other children were likely born to both brothers. If we assume that Cain and Abel were born in the Garden of Eden, or even shortly thereafter, and that Seth was born five years after Abel's death, then Cain and Abel had 100 years to have children, as did Adam and Eve. Mathematically, the population could have grown to over 2 million people by the time Adam was 130 years old. Whatever the scenario, verse 17 presumes the existence of a sizable population, and we must assume a natural progression for this to have occurred (see Appendix 20, The Companion Bible).

It is crucial to understand the mathematical possibilities of such early human demographics. Considering Adam and Eve as the progenitors, let us construct a model of population growth under specified conditions to gain further insight into the potential size of the population around the time of Cain and Abel.

Assuming that Adam and Eve began their family soon after Eve's was formed by God, and based on the genealogies and lifespans presented in Genesis, we might hypothesize a scenario where:

1. Each couple begins childbearing at the age of 30.
2. They have one child every 18 months.
3. The childbearing period extends for 100 years.
4. Each child survives to reproduce under similar conditions.

To visualize the implications of these assumptions, consider the following detailed calculations:

- Each couple produces approximately $\frac{100 \text{ years}}{1.5 \text{ years/child}} = 66.67$ children.
- Starting with just one couple, the next generation would ideally begin 30 years later, giving each successive generation the same reproductive pattern.

Implementing this into a model where each generation fully reproduces under these conditions, the growth is calculated as follows:

- The first generation, starting 30 years after creation, would comprise about 33 couples, given the practicality of pairing.
- By the end of 60 years, these 33 couples would contribute approximately 1,122 couples.
- After 90 years, this second generation would expand to around 38,148 couples.
- By 120 years, a significant increase would result in about 1,297,032 couples.
- Thus, by approximately 125 years, the estimated total population would be around 2.6 million individuals.

This exponential growth rate underscores a critical aspect of early Biblical genealogies—high fertility rates combined with extended lifespans as recorded in scriptures contribute to a rapid increase in population. Such a model, while speculative, helps to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding the textual assertion in Genesis 4:17 that Cain, upon murdering Abel and facing divine punishment, had enough people around to fear for his life and eventually build a city. The implications of such a model not only illuminate possible demographic scenarios but also enhance our understanding of early human society as depicted in Biblical narratives. This population modeling, based on the conditions described in Genesis, thus supports the hypothesis that there was a substantial population during Cain's lifetime, which would make his social interactions, marriage, and city-building plausible within the scriptural context.

The text introduces Enoch, the first named grandchild. It doesn't specify whether Enoch's birth occurred before or after Abel's death. The text also doesn't exclude the possibility of other grandchildren preceding Enoch. Thus, the narrative could be a flashback to the birth of Cain's firstborn, predating the events of verse 7. The name Enoch translates to "dedicated" or "trained", and can be transliterated as Henoch or Hanoch. This name is shared by several individuals in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Given the population potential, it is no surprise that Cain built a city. But more than just having the population to sustain a city, Cain's circumstances necessitated this shift. The curse placed upon him meant that the land would no longer yield its bounty to him, thus pushing him towards an alternative means of livelihood. In a city, one can trade services or goods in exchange for food and other necessities. As such, Cain, driven by the harsh necessity of his punishment, was pushed to pioneer a new societal structure, a hub of commerce and trade - a city.

THE MARCH OF TIME

Over time, one generation after another is born, continuing the lineage. Verse 18 provides a snapshot of six known generations of Cain, including Cain himself: Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methusael, and Lamech. The Bible quickly glosses over each of these individuals, providing no further information. Even Hebrew rabbinical tradition, as far as I am aware, offers no additional insights into these individuals.

While we are given the names of these six generations of Cain's descendants, it's important to understand these individuals as representatives of their generation, most likely the oldest or most prominent members, but not the only children born to that generation. Alongside these generations, descendants of Seth (who has yet to be introduced in this narrative) and possibly even Abel (if he had any children prior to his death) would also have been born.

Interestingly, unlike the genealogies of Seth in Chapter 5, we are not given any specific lifespan information for these individuals in Cain's lineage. There are no indicators of the age at which they gave birth or the age at which they died. This might be a subtle way of guiding the reader to understand that the primary narrative focus is on the line of Seth. Alternatively, it could simply be a method of streamlining the narrative. However, considering the long lifespans recorded in Seth's line, it would be reasonable to infer that the individuals in Cain's line also had extended lifespans.

ALL ABOUT LAMECH

Beginning in verse 16, the text takes an intriguing turn. Instead of swiftly moving from one generation to another, it focuses on Lamech, his two wives, three sons, and one daughter. This level of detail is not only unusual for the Cain genealogy but also for the other genealogies in Genesis. Typically, the genealogies follow a pattern of "Father begat son begat grandson begat great-grandson," etc. The deviation from this pattern in Lamech's case invites the reader to pause and question, "why this change of pace?"

Before we backtrack and consider Lamech's children, it is essential that we first delve into verses 23 and 24. These verses seem to offer a vital perspective that will guide our understanding of the narrative.

In these verses, Lamech, the sixth generation from Cain, recites a cryptic poem to his wives, saying, "Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold."

The ambiguity of Lamech's cryptic poem presents a significant challenge. The King James Version offers a seemingly clear translation, but also provides an alternative in the translator notes: "Or, I would slay a man in my wound, and a young man in my heart." This introduces uncertainty regarding Lamech's confession. The prevalent translation and interpretation suggest Lamech might be boasting about committing two murders. However, the translator's note indicates that instead of confessing a double murder, Lamech might be revealing a deep-seated pain or passion that **COULD** lead to murder, but likely never will. The Hebrew text's poetic nature further heightens this ambiguity, making it improbable to definitively comprehend Lamech's message to his wives.

Another interpretation can be that Lamech's statement is more of a rhetorical question rather than a confession. In this perspective, it would be as if he's asking, "Have I slain a man for my pain, or a young man for my hurt?" The implied answer in this context would be, "No! You've not done any such thing!" Thus, it could be a denial of any wrongdoing on Lamech's part, further adding to the ambiguities of this cryptic poem.

If we entertain the idea that Lamech has not murdered anyone, then it seems that he's addressing an issue that's been troubling his wives. In the context of the Biblical narrative, it's plausible that Lamech's wives were aware of the curse placed on Cain, and feared its implications for their own family. Specifically, they might have feared that the punishment of Cain would pass down to the 7th generation - their children.

Lamech's cryptic poem, in this case, could be seen as an attempt to reassure his wives. By stating that if anyone harms his children, they would be avenged seventy-sevenfold, he might be trying to alleviate their fears. This interpretation provides nuanced and "minority view" understanding of Lamech's poem and gives additional context to the conversations and fears that might have been prevalent in early human society as depicted in the Biblical narrative.

While this interpretation is not the most straightforward reading of the text, it is allowed by the text and it does account for the unusually detailed information given about the "seventh generation" family. The traditional reading of the text leaves us wondering why there is such a focus on this particular family. This alternative reading may provide some insight into that question, although it is speculative and should be considered alongside other interpretations. For another presentation of the text from this format see Zvi Grumet's "Genesis: From Creation To Covenant" in the Maggid Studies in Tanakh series from Koren Publishers, 2017 (pgs 64-66).

Taking this less-than-standard translation/interpretation into account, we find that Lamech may not be confessing a bold and audacious set of double murders. Rather, he could be confessing that he rejects a seventh-generation curse.

But could it be that Lamech also holds some fears of the vengeance of God on Cain coming to his own children, and so he compensates for his fears of this curse in the very names and occupations of his sons? That is the topic for our next chapter.