

ECF 17th September 2017 Genesis 4:17-26 What Kind of City?

Over the past few decades there has been a phenomenal growth in the cities of this world. It has been estimate that:

- In 1800, only 3% of the world's population lived in cities.
- By 1950, this had increased to 30%.
- By the end of 2008, this figure passed 50% for the first time in the history of the world.
- And it is predicted that by 2050, 70% of the world's population will live in cities.

And some of these cities are just mind-blowing in their size. A mega-city is defined as one that has a population over 10 million. In 1970, there were only two. Now there are 39 – the largest of which is in Tokyo with 38.8 million inhabitants.

We are living in the age of the city! But this is not a completely new phenomena. Genesis 4 describes the building of the first city. Like today, it led to amazing technological developments. But also like today it had a problem at its heart.

And it reminds us, that wherever we live in this world, we need to become part of a different city, one not built by human hands.

Genesis 4:17-26: “Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. ¹⁸To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

¹⁹Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. ²⁰Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. ²¹His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute.

²²Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

²³Lamech said to his wives,

“Adah and Zillah, listen to me;

wives of Lamech, hear my words.

I have killed a man for wounding me,

a young man for injuring me.

²⁴If Cain is avenged seven times,

then Lamech seventy-seven times.”

²⁵Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” ²⁶Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord.”

1. A Man-Made City

Last week we saw that, as a result of him murdering his brother Abel, Cain was driven from God's presence: “Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.” Genesis 4:16 His sin had separated him from his family, his community and ultimately from God. He went further from Eden, further from communion with God.

But Cain, just like all of us, still longed for community. And so, as he was banished from his own community where he grew up, he decided to set up his own.

a) Starting a Family

First of all he started a family. “Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch.” Genesis 4:17. Of course, this causes a problem with many people as they ask, “If the Bible is true that God started the human population with just one couple, where did Cain get his wife from?”

But I think the answer is that Genesis 5:4 says that “After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters.” And so simply Cain married one of his sisters. That generation wasn't the only one to do this, as years later, Abraham also married his half-sister. (Genesis 20:12)

Clearly this is not meant to be a pattern for us to follow today. Because of the accumulated mutations in our DNA, in-breeding like this causes all sorts of health issues. And the Law given by God to Moses prohibited this kind of marrying of close relatives. But this is how Cain started his family.

b) Building a City

But he didn't only start a family. He also built a city. “Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch.” Genesis 4:17

The name Enoch means initiation. It suggests the idea of a new beginning. And this was the beginning of city-life. We've

no way of telling what size this was, how it functioned or what it looked like. But in some way Cain sought to bring people together, to live in community, work side by side, sharing their resources and their strength.

c) Outwardly Prosperous

And from the outside looking on, this city prospered. Cain's great great great great grandsons are described here as the founders of major technological and cultural developments.

There were developments in agriculture: "[Jabal... was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock.](#)" Genesis 4:20 He developed a nomadic lifestyle to allow him to keep herds of various kinds of animals.

There were also developments in music, as his brother, "[Jubal... was the father of all who play the harp and flute.](#)" Genesis 4:21 He was the first musician, creating and performing beautiful music that delighted and touched people's hearts.

And there were developments in craftsmanship as his brother, "[Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron.](#)" Genesis 4:22 He founded the metal industries, working out how to produce these metals and turn them into strong and useful tools for all kinds of jobs.

This is what happens when people get together in cities. Bringing large numbers of people together stimulates creativity and expands human knowledge and allows people to specialize in a particular skill.

This is the reason why today, cities are the main driver of productivity in the world. Cities already generate more than 80% of the world's GDP. And this is expected to continue to rise.

d) Inwardly Corrupt

So the city that Cain built was part of what pushed men and women to create, innovate and develop. It looked like this society was thriving. But underneath this outward prosperity, was a major problem. And this is illustrated by Lamech, the father of these three inventors.

i) Redesigning Marriage

First of all, Lamech redesigned marriage according to his own ideas. "[Lamech married two women.](#)" Genesis 4:19.

Some people don't have a problem with this. In over 50 countries today polygamy is legal, at least for the men who are allowed to marry more than one woman – but not the other way around! This is usually because of a Muslim majority in those countries.

But increasingly secular people are asking why not? A couple of years ago in Brazil, a notary sparked controversy by accepting a civil union between one man and two women and in the US, the reality TV show "Sister Wives" has sparked a debate that asks that if society can redefine marriage to include people of the same sex, then why limit it to just two people?

But we don't believe that marriage is a man-made institution that we can adapt or restructure to fit our ideas. Marriage is God-ordained and God-designed: "[A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.](#)" Genesis 2:24 God's intention was for one man and one woman to leave their old family connections and to commit to giving themselves to each other in a life-long, intimate, faithful and loving relationship.

And messing with this, produces disastrous consequences. This is the point of the polygamy stories in the Bible. Some people criticise the Bible because many of the heroes of the faith had more than one wife. But every time the Bible makes clear the problems and heartaches that causes:

- Think about the family conflict between Abraham's wives, Sarah and Hagar.
- Or the jealousy and suspicion between Jacob's wives, Rachel & Leah.
- Or the mess in David's multi-wife family, including rape, murder and rebellion.
- Or the disastrous consequences of Solomon's 700 wives and 300 concubines, that led him into idolatry.

The Bible is clear, whenever we move away from God's design for our lives, then sooner or later we will face disaster. God's design is always the best and most stable foundation for our lives, our families and our societies. His will is always, "[Good, pleasing and perfect.](#)" Romans 12:2

ii) Ruthless Murder

But Lamech did more than try to redefine marriage. He also committed ruthless murder. "[Adah and Zillah, listen to me;](#)

wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
²⁴ If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times.” Genesis 4:23-24

Lamech had been struck and injured by a young man. We don't know the details about the circumstances of this attack, the seriousness of the injury or the age or motivation of this young man.

All Lamech tells us is how he responded. There was no restraint or self-control. No attempt to understand why it had happened. No thought of expressing mercy and offering forgiveness. No seeking proportional compensation. Instead, in act of ruthless and excessive retaliation, Lamech killed this young man.

And that's not all. Last week, we saw that when Cain, his great great great grandfather, killed his brother Abel, he showed no remorse for his actions but instead he tried to cover it up, avoid his responsibility for it.

But Lamech went even lower. He didn't just try and cover it up. He didn't just try and duck from his responsibility. Instead he proudly boasted about it in a song to his wives and revelled in the fact that his personal revenge was much greater than that threatened by God on anyone who would attack Cain!

This is an insight into the morality of this society. It not only permitted sinful behaviour, but it celebrated it. It took God's standard of right and wrong and turned it completely on its head, celebrating something tragic, boasting about something shameful.

This is what Isaiah wrote about in Isaiah 5:20:
“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,
who put darkness for light and light for darkness,
who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

So this is the picture of this first man-made city:

- Outwardly it was prosperous: innovative, creative, productive, cultured and advanced.
- But inwardly it was corrupted by the sin in people's hearts that rejected God's design and gloried in their brutal self-centredness.

And sadly, in many ways, this is the picture of the man-made cities of today. Yes, they are places of amazing and mind-blowing research and development – in food production, medicine, transport, communication and technology. In a few years we have gone from phones looking like this (with dials and wires connecting it to the wall), to the iPhone X with face recognition and more computing power than we could ever have imagined growing up!

And yet, we still have the problem of human heart. At our core we're still rebelling against God's design for humanity. In our thoughts, attitudes, words and actions we still display a terrifying level selfishness and self-centredness that does what it wants irrespective of the impact on others.

And the reality is that no amount of education, progress or development will change that. “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” Jeremiah 17:9

2. A God-Made City

It is a bleak picture, and yet, there is hope for humanity, because there is another kind of city spoken about in the Bible. This is not a man-made city like the one Cain built. Instead this is one that God is building.

a) Another Family

Its foundation is mentioned here as: “Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, “God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.” Genesis 4:25

The story of man in relationship with God did not end with Abel's death and Cain's descent into depravity. Instead God graciously stepped in and gave Adam and Eve another son.

He was named him Seth, which means granted or appointed, because this boy was granted or appointed to be the substitute for Abel, to take his place, to start again with a new family line that would seek after God.

This began to happen after Seth's son was born. *"At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord."* Genesis 4:26. And this would continue down through the family line of Seth, through people like Enoch and Noah, Abraham.

b) Abraham waiting

Abraham answered God's call and left his home city of Ur and wandered through the land of Canaan because *"He was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."* Hebrews 11:10

Unfortunately his nephew Lot could not wait for this promise to become a reality. He was drawn into the immoral city of Sodom with disastrous consequences for him and his family. But in faith Abraham waited for the fulfilment of the promise of a God-designed and a God-built city.

c) Jerusalem failing

Eventually, this led to the establishment of Jerusalem, as King David's capital city. God said about it that it was *"The city where I chose to put my Name."* 1 Kings 11:36

Jerusalem was supposed to be the city of God. It should have been a shining light in this world, declaring the glory and majesty of God, drawing people to him in humble faith. So Psalm 48 says:

*"Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise,
in the city of our God, his holy mountain.*

*² It is beautiful in its loftiness,
the joy of the whole earth...*

*³ God is in her citadels;
he has shown himself to be her fortress."* Psalm 48:1-3

But Jerusalem miserably failed to fulfil its calling. Instead it rebelled against God and copied the nations around it in immorality and idolatry. As a result it was completely destroyed.

d) Jesus Calling

But God's purpose and plan for a city designed and built for him was not be stopped. Instead, he sent his Son to die on the cross just outside of the city of Jerusalem, to pay for our sins and to build a new community of people who would respond to his call with repentance and faith. They became *"A chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God."* 1 Peter 2:9

And if we have put our faith in Jesus, then whatever our nationality, background or location, this is our identity. As the church, we have been called to live in this world as a different kind of city, a radically counter-culture community of people, whose architect and builder is God.

We're called to live by his standards, follow his Word, be led by his Spirit, honour his name, seek his kingdom, hunger and thirst for his righteousness, express his love and declare his gospel and draw people to faith in his Son! Jesus said, *"You are the light of the world. A city on a hill..."* Matthew 5:14

e) Heaven Fulfilling

But the ultimate fulfilment of this calling is not yet here. For now, we are to some extent still like Abraham looking and longing for a better city than the man-made communities around us.

But one day, John's vision in Revelation 21 will be our reality: *"I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ⁴ He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'" Revelation 21:2-4*

This is not like Cain's city or the megacities of the world today. It is not a city of superficial prosperity but inward corruption. It is not a place of selfishness and evil, of skyscrapers and slums, of inequality and prejudice, of fear and loneliness, of abusive power and crime.

Instead this is God's city, where God's presence dwells, where God's comfort wipes away every tear, where God's love fills

every heart, where God's glory is declared by every voice!

And it started here in Genesis as people started to call on the name of the Lord! And it is still being built as God's people go out into the world and make disciples.

3. Where Do You Belong?

And so we have a choice to make today. Which kind of city do we belong to?

- Are we going to try and fit in with this world and its man-made standards and man-focused ambitions?
- Or are we going to declare that we belong to the city whose architect and builder is God? Through faith in Jesus, are we going to live by a different standard, follow a different plan, seek a different goal?

This is the decision that each of us face. And so, as the writer of Hebrews said, ["Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore. ¹⁴ For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come."](#)

Hebrews 13:13-14

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September 17th 2017