

CITY LIFE

by Steve Zeisler

One of my favorite Mark Twain stories is called *The Story of the Bad Little Boy*. The following is an excerpt:

"Once there was a bad little boy whose name was Jim-though, if you will notice, you will find that bad little boys are nearly always called James in your Sunday-school books. It was strange, but still it was true, that this one was called Jim.

He didn't have any sick mother, either-a sick mother who was pious and had the consumption, and would be glad to lie down in the grave and be at rest but for the strong love she bore her boy, and the anxiety she felt that the world might be harsh and cold toward him when she was gone... But it was different with this fellow. He was named Jim, and there wasn't anything the matter with his mother-no consumption, nor anything of that kind. She was rather stout than otherwise, and she was not pious; moreover, she was not anxious on Jim's account. She said if he were to break his neck it wouldn't be much loss. She always spanked Jim to sleep, and she never kissed him good night; on the contrary, she boxed his ears when she was ready to leave him...

Once he climbed up in Farmer Acorn's apple tree to steal apples, and the limb didn't break, and he didn't fall and break his arm, and get torn by the farmer's great dog, and then languish on a sickbed for weeks, and repent and become good. Oh, no; he stole as many apples as he wanted and came down all right; and he was all ready for the dog, too, and knocked him endways with a brick when he came to tear him. It was very strange... Nothing like it in any of the Sunday-school books...

And he grew up and married, and raised a large family... and got wealthy by all manner of cheating and rascality; and now he is the infernalesst wickedest scoundrel in his native village, and is universally respected, and belongs to the legislature.

So you see there never was a bad James in the Sunday-school books that had such a streak of luck as this sinful Jim with the charmed life." (1)

We're going to consider someone else whose story is unlike the moral tales that Mark Twain remembered from the Sunday School books of his era. In such stories, being pious inevitably leads to a better life than being wicked. But the Bible doesn't tell stories like that, because life isn't that way. The passage before us is about a godless man, Cain. It is not a story of immediate ruin and sorrow. In the last message (Discovery Paper 4561) we began with the account of Cain's killing his brother in Genesis 4:1-15. Now we're going to look further at the choices he made and their results. Genesis 4:16-26:

So Cain went out from the LORD'S presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

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. To 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.

Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

Lamech 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.
If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."

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." Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

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

Verse 16 says Cain lived in the land of Nod, which means wandering. The term "lived" describes staking a claim, or settling there by conviction.

There are two statements that express the central message of this account in verses 16 and 26, respectively. Verse 16 says, "...Cain went out from the LORD'S presence and lived in the land of Nod...." He made a deliberate decision to reject the words, influence, and glory of God. Verse 26 recounts the birth of Seth and Enosh and says, "At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD." These are the two great options for human experience. Over the course of a lifetime we will either reject God by our choices, deliberately move away from him, and stake our claim in the land of wandering; or we will call on the name of the Lord for the help we need to survive.

A PLACE FAR FROM GOD

Let's reconsider Cain's awareness of himself. What did he believe that made him decide that it was time for him to depart from the presence of God and settle in the land of wandering? Notice the conclusion he drew after God pointed out his murder and lies. Verse 13: "Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.'" In other words, "I cannot bear the condition of my life, and it's your fault."

Cain articulated some of what was hard about his life. First, he was being driven from the land. This is the land that God described as having drunk the blood of Abel. Cain had a guilty conscience. The earth, in some mysterious way, reminded him over and over again that he was a murderer. A guilty conscience is a terrible thing to live with.

Further, he said God had driven him away in verse 14: "...And I will be hidden from your presence." But the Lord made no statement about hiding or distancing himself from Cain.

He also said, "I'm a wanderer; restless, belonging nowhere, having no roots, no peace. Woe is me."

And lastly, "I'm in danger. Everywhere I go, I'm fearful of what will befall me. And because I hate guilt, restlessness, and a life of fear, I have to make changes to deal with my problem."

This foolish accusation underlying his thinking was that God had created the problems.

In fact, God did not create Cain's problems, he only described them. He asked questions, and when Cain attempted to lie, God exposed him as a liar. He exposed him as a murderer. He declared to Cain that the earth would remember Abel's bloody death and call to the murderer's conscience. God made Cain see himself.

That is what Cain couldn't stand. To live in God's presence meant that the things about him that created

anxiety and conflict were going to be out in the open. He couldn't lie to God. God unmasked his lies. Cain was running from himself.

WHAT GOD DIDN'T SAY

We will consider what the Bible says about Cain's city in a moment. But we should first note the inevitable questions about which the scriptures are silent. Where did Cain get his wife from and where did his enemies come from? These questions are not new, and though the text gives us enough information to infer an answer, no clear and complete statement is offered.

It turns out that God is perfectly comfortable with leaving information out of the Bible. He has decided to tell us the answers to the important questions, and leave us with mysteries and unknowns. Most of us wish that the creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 answered more scientific questions than they do. The narrative that tells us the story of the first marriage comes with few "how-to's" regarding marriage. That would have been a great place for God to give us guidelines on successful married life, but he doesn't.

And there is no thorough explanation as to where Cain's wife came from. An answer, however, is implied in Genesis 5:3: "When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image; and he named him Seth. After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years and had other sons and daughters." Adam and Eve may have had a great many children.

We need to remember that the story being told doesn't concern all the children in each generation, only one—the son born in the line that will lead to the Savior. When Cain was born, the very first child, Eve said literally, "I have gotten a man, the LORD." She thought the first child was the Promised One, an awful mistake. The second child, Abel, was killed. Finally a third child was born to Adam and Eve, "in the likeness of" Adam. He represented the godly line in his generation. We see a pattern in these early genealogies. Notice 5:7: "...After he became the father of Enosh, Seth live 807 years and had other sons and daughters." But only Enosh's name was significant. Verse 9: "When Enosh had lived 90 years, he became the father of Kenan. And after he became the father of Kenan, Enosh lived 815 years and had other sons and daughters." But only Kenan was important. And the pattern continues.

We can assume that Adam and Eve had many children, and because sin's degradations were just beginning, these children could have grown quickly to maturity and had children of their own. Multiple births may have occurred. Human population increased quickly, especially when we consider how long-lived the antediluvians were. Cain's wife, therefore, was probably either his sister or his niece.

A BUSINESSMAN, AN ARTIST, AND A SCIENTIST

Let's return to chapter 4. Cain hated what he had to face of himself in the presence of God, so he left and founded his own city. What can we learn about Cain's city from the description given? Well, it's a bit like Mark Twain's story. We might have hoped that Cain would be a wretched, lonely, miserable, anxiety-ridden soul who was a complete failure at everything, or that he would be a dastardly scoundrel of epic proportions. It is comforting to see unrighteousness punished. But that isn't what happened. Cain was a successful parent, for one thing. He had children. He named the city he founded after his son. The city was successful. He probably lived to see at least six generations of his progeny (the six generations mentioned in verses 17-22).

These great-great-great-great-grandsons of Cain are mentioned in particular. They were fascinating people who accomplished remarkable things. Verse 20 says, "Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock." Raising large flocks, having them reproduce and grow and thrive, was the creation of wealth in ancient days. People measured their wealth by the size of their flocks. Animals were the means of production of food, skins, wool, and other things people needed to live. The draft animals plowed the fields. Other animals were the source of transportation. So one of Cain's offspring was the first great economic thinker of the human race, and everyone since who has advanced our ability to do commerce can look back to Jabal, the son of Lamech, as his or her forerunner.

Another son born to Lamech was Jubal. It says he was the first to play the flute and the harp. He was the first

artist, the first one to create beauty for its own sake. All the inspiring music that has ever been made originated in Cain's city.

Lastly, Tubal-Cain was the first scientist and technologist, discovering the physical properties of creation and harnessing them, forging tools to improve human lives. All of the science and technology with which we're so familiar in our day goes back to this child of Cain.

You see, this is not the story of failure and misery. Cain left the presence of God and started a successful family. He may well have been a good father. There's no reason to assume that he wasn't. He saw his family grow and his city grow. His offspring have influenced every generation since then.

Mark Twain's story reminds us how naive it is to think that good people always succeed and bad people always fail. The world isn't like that. There are a great many good parents, people who do good work, become successful in all fields of endeavor, who have rejected God and everything about him.

THE HOME OF THE VIOLENT

That's part of Cain's story, but we also ought to look at the rest of what Cain's city was like, because Cain's city did not solve Cain's problem. He was restless, homeless, alone, and misunderstood. And in Cain's city, like every modern city today, the loneliest people in the world resided shoulder-to-shoulder with each other. Cain could not make a home for the restless heart his acts of rebellion had created. He couldn't drive away the guilt that continually haunted him. God would hear the cry of his dead brother all his life, and so would he. And his fear of violence didn't go away with the building of this city. His city became the home of the violent.

Those who lived in Cain's city would eventually have Lamech as a neighbor. Lamech was a villain. Cain was conflicted and anxious over killing his brother. He lied because he didn't want to face himself or have anybody confront him as a murderer. His conscience bothered him for what he had done. But Lamech killed people and liked it. He bragged and even wrote songs about it. He was also the first man in the record to have more than one wife. "My appetites are such that I can't be satisfied with what satisfies everybody else. I will give vent to my appetites. I am proud of my capacity for violence. I will love and serve myself and only myself."

Eventually the civilization that Cain's city began ended up as the terrible words of Genesis 6:5 describe it: "The LORD saw how great man's wickedness had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time." Eventually, the civilization would become so thoroughly wicked that it would need to be destroyed.

Remember the haunting question Jesus asked his followers: "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:36.) Suppose that in Cain's city, the economy that was discovered and that succeeded there made them richer than they had ever imagined being. Suppose they were geniuses in the use of musical instruments and could create the most exquisite art. Suppose the tools they forged led to the grandest accomplishments. What if they gained the whole world-and lost their soul? Cain deliberately founded his city apart from the presence of God. It was a foolish decision with eternal consequences.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD

The other alternative was chosen by Seth and his son-to call on the name of the Lord, to put a relationship with God first. Now, what happens when we decide that intimacy with God is worth more than everything else? What do we get? One thing Jesus said we get is a cross. "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). We get persecution, misunderstanding, and difficulty. But we also get to see our hearts as they really are, to have God expose and forgive and change us in ways that are profound and real. We go from being wanderers to being pilgrims. The city that God has prepared for us will never be built on this earth. It's in heaven. And we will spend a lifetime wandering, not aimlessly and restlessly and without peace, but as pilgrims seeing our destination in the distance..

In the final analysis, what we get is the Lord. We may have no advantages and perhaps many disadvantages compared to the person who lives in Cain's city, but we get Christ's presence, his love, knowing his concern

for us, having him hear and answer our prayers. Having the Lord Jesus Christ at the center of our lives is worth everything.

At the end of the apostle Paul's life, he passed the torch to his son in the faith, Timothy. Paul knew that his journey was almost over. In 2 Timothy 4:5-8 he reflected on what it was like to be at the end of the pilgrimage, to know that he had finished the course, and he wanted to give some instruction to young Timothy. This is Eugene Peterson's paraphrase:

"But you-keep your eye on what you're doing; accept the hard times along with the good; keep the Message alive; do a thorough job as God's servant.

You take over. I'm about to die, my life an offering on God's altar. This is the only race worth running. I've run hard right to the finish, believed all the way. All that's left now is the shouting-God's applause! Depend on it, he's an honest judge. He'll do right not only by me, but by everyone eager for his coming." (2)

A life that rejoices in the presence of God is the only one worth living. Below are the lyrics of the hymn *We Come, O Christ, to You* 3 (verses 1, 3, and 4). Let's make them our prayer.

We come, O Christ, to You,
True Son of God and man;
By Whom all things consist,
In Whom all life began:
In You alone we live and move
And have our being in Your love.

You are the living Truth!
All wisdom dwells in You,
The Source of every skill,
The One Eternal True!

O great I AM! In You we rest,
Sure answer to our every quest.

You only are true Life.
To know You is to live
The more abundant life
That earth can never give:

O risen Lord! We live in You,
In us each day Your life renew!"

NOTES

1. Mark Twain, *The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain*, edited by Charles Neider, © 1957 by Charles Neider. Hanover House, Garden City, NY. Pp. 6-9.
2. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*, © 1993, 1994. NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO. P. 449.
3. Margaret Clarkson. *Words* © Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship. InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL.

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Genesis 4:16-26
Thirteenth Message
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[Back to Index Page](#)

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