

Beacons of the Bible

Lamech

By Henry Law

1869

One day Lamech said to Adah and Zillah, "Listen to me, my wives. I have killed a youth who attacked and wounded me. If anyone who kills Cain is to be punished seven times, anyone who takes revenge against me will be punished seventy-seven times!" Genesis 4:23-24

Here a mysterious personage appears. Dark veils envelop him. He moves with shrouded features rapidly across the sacred page. His few words startle rather than inform. While the eye watches him, he vanishes. Before the ear can fully catch his voice, silence stills the scene.

But still he occupies a place on hallowed ground. He is a Bible-character. The Spirit forbids him to be buried in oblivion, and gives him a station in the ever-living word. Thus he stands, as a warning Beacon. Each pupil in the school of truth is bid to learn from Lamech.

Let us then now draw near with prayerful hearts. "Holy Spirit! this is Your record. Pour down explanatory rays. Shine on this dial, which Your wisdom raises. Bring light out of this obscurity. Unfold your gracious purpose. Give the right key, that the casket may fly open. May every reader be wiser by the survey of these dread features!"

But let idle curiosity retire. Marvels, indeed, are here, but no details. No lengthened statements gratify a prying mind. No ingenuity can expand the brevity. No research can gain more than the words--*One day Lamech said to Adah and Zillah, "Listen to me, my wives. I have killed a youth who attacked and wounded me. If anyone who kills Cain is to be punished seven times, anyone who takes revenge against me will be punished seventy-seven times!"*

But the brief words are very sad. They plant us in a region enlivened by no sun--in a field without one flower--in a parched desert with no cooling stream--in a deep valley of dreadful shadows. Each sound falls mournfully as the knell of death. The key note of this dirge is sin. Vice bubbles up as from a fountain of iniquity. The whole scene appals. There is not one bright spot. Hope cannot hope, where all is hopeless. Pity may pity, but with much trembling. None can leave Lamech and not sigh.

The wretched speaker is of the family of Cain. *Lamech* is a vile descendant of a vile progenitor. When five generations had passed away, in him Cain seems to reappear. It may be well to approach him by marking the complexion of his TIMES. They show *the piteous state of men devoid of grace*--in whom self is the worshiped idol, and selfishness the master-passion.

The house of Cain grew rapidly. They sparkled in nature's lively gifts. Their energy was great. Their intellect was keen. Their contrivances were shrewd. But we look in vain for love of God, or labors in His service. They planned and toiled indeed. But it was all for temporal aggrandizement--for worldly interest--for comforts, for pleasures. Extensive buildings spread. Inventions in the use of metals advanced. Distinction in melodious arts was reached. Cities arose. Works in brass and iron acquired fame. The harp and organ sounded in their feasts. They became a multitude great in earth's greatness--rich in earth's wealth--skillful in earth's skill--polished in earth's polish--luxurious in earth's luxuries. They were many, and they were not crude. They ascended high steps of cultivation. But all their industry was the intensity of worldly-mindedness. God was not the moving principle. They were emphatically "of the world." This was their character, "he that is of the earth is earthly." John 3:31.

Can we advance without a sigh! how pitifully foolish are the votaries of the world! They may have gifts, which glitter splendidly--but it is only for a speck of time. Their brightest sun soon sets in blackest night. Their joys are no true joys. Their continuance is a fleeting dream. Their flowers have many a thorn, and in the plucking fade. Their fruitless blossoms soon decay.

Children of men, give ear. Why is life yours? Why are you called to tread this earth? Why are immortal spirits planted in your breasts? Why do grand faculties raise you as creation's lords? It has been nobly said, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy Him forever." Shall then all your time, and means, and powers, and energies be frittered in the sordid work of serving time and gratifying self? Awake, arise, renounce such folly. Grovel not in such mire! Study the glorious truths of God's most glorious word. Be one with Christ. Live as citizens of the bright world. Walk with God. Join the high company of His sons. Shine as lights below. Work for eternity. In every employ seek first the heavenly kingdom--the good of men--the glory of the Lord. Take as your chart the faithful saying--"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." 1 John 2:15.

When we contemplate man's most brilliant and successful efforts--the books, in which high genius shines--the stately edifices--the almost living statue--the speaking picture--and other monuments of splendid minds; admiration is turned to mourning by the reflection, "Was this designed to magnify the Lord?" "Whose is this image and superscription?" It avails nothing to have loud praise, where we are not, if we have torment where we are. Many who are crowned as great and

glorious here, may awake to "shame and everlasting contempt." Dan. 12:2. The old world, with all its ingenuities, ripened for ruin. "And they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away." Matthew 24:39

Such were the *times* of Lamech. Now hear his VOICE. He speaks unto his "wives." But why are there two? Is God's ordinance thus wide? Is double matrimony permitted by the sacred rite? Far otherwise. Consider its intent. God in His tender mercy plans sweetest solace. Therefore He places one of man's nature by his side--to be a second self--a sharer of happiness--a partner of distress--another heart, to which each care may be unbosomed--whose love may make life's journey smooth--whose sympathy may render burdens light--who may diminish loads, and double joys--who may meet tear with tear and smile with smile--who may be intertwined in every fellowship, until death break the bond. Intent and gracious thus to multiply delights, God brought to man "an help-meet for him"--or, as the original declares, "an help as before him"--always near to minister and aid. Genesis 2:18.

Thus the design excludes plurality--and therefore the ordinance grants but one wife. God gives not Eves, but Eve.

Jesus adds His authoritative comment. "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one." Matthew 19:5-6. No sentence can be more explicit. Two--not many--shall be one. Adherence shall be to the wife, not wives. But the design is frustrated, when husband joins himself to more than one. Oneness is then broken into diverse parts. Affections which should have one channel, diverge into distracting streams. Marriage is no more godly union but confusion. It is not love, but jealousy. The sweetest type of Christ and His one spouse, the Church, is debased into dissoluteness.

Lamech disregards God's will. His reckless passions burst the wise restraint. Greedily he wallows in licentiousness--and by his lusts degrades the hallowed oneness into community of beasts. Thus he scorns the primal law. It is not said, that he was the first to perpetrate this sin. But the first record of it claims his name. No polygamist in history precedes him. In sacred annals he stands at the head of a new crime.

But did it end in him? Evil, once introduced, spreads as a flame amid dry stubble. The weed, once rooted, can hardly be eradicated. Through latest ages the fruit may still spring up. Hence this *domestic misery* pollutes not only wilds of savage life, but families of grace. Even David strayed in this miry path. Reader! in pity of others, if not of self, mortify each rising sin. By yielding you may found a mountain of misery--and earn the ignoble fame of "Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin." Future generations may trace their wretchedness to your example. Many may wish, that you had never lived. Lost souls may loathe you as paving their road of ruin.

Lamech sinks into blacker guilt. He next appears confessedly a **murderer**. He openly proclaims, "I have slain a man." True it may be, that no immediate link joins his offences. But true it is, that sin is always a spreading plague. One fault indulged soon swells into a deepening torrent, and widens into a boundless sea. One little leak may sink the noblest ship. One little spark may carry fiery fury to immense expanse. Sin's property is to blind and harden. It soon obscures the light, and then hideousness affrights not, and a monster seems not monstrous. Its contact blunts the edge of conscience; and he, who previously said, "Is your servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" now quickly perpetrates the very deed and blushes not.

See this in Lamech. He tramples down the marriage-law. Then human blood pollutes his hands. He goes literally in the very "way of Cain." Let it be granted, that no perceptible attraction unites these branches of transgression. But let it be maintained, that sin will not live single. It quickly propagates, and fearfully extends.

Of the provoking cause, and of the sad details, history speaks not. Until the great day shall reveal all secret things, we can only know that he slew a man. Until all deeds are published to an assembled world, the bare fact only can be seen, that, like Cain, he was a murderer.

Reader! perhaps horror thrills through your heart at this terrific sound. You sigh, "How could this be! Where was his conscience! Was human feeling utterly extinct! How could the thought arise! How could it be cherished! How could the hand be raised! How could the victim be looked on and not spared!"

It is well to shudder at such sinfulness of sin. But in your great loathing turn your eye inward. Mark what passions lurk in your own breast. See what monsters nestle in the chambers of your imagination. There are dormant vipers there. Temptation and opportunity would quicken them into activity. Your heart holds seeds of all iniquity. True, you turn pale at thought of murder. Once David felt the like abhorrence. True, the ripe crime pollutes you not. But what is the ember, from which this flame bursts forth? Is it not anger? Our Lord's illustrious teaching traces these floods of evil to their secret source. Anger conceived, retained, fostered, fanned, soon becomes rage. Rage flares into fury. Fury maddens into recklessness. Recklessness is blind to consequence. Thus, then, you may possess the moving cause, without advancing to the terrific deed. God's eye may see all full-blown evil in your embryo-thoughts. Therefore in all hatred of another's crime, the gracious man will hate himself the most. He will confess that nature always tends to sin. He will ascribe his guiltless walk to screening grace and to his guardian God. Lamech cries, Kill every sinful motion when it first stirs. It will soon lead to nether-millstone hardness. It may provoke the hopeless doom, "Let him alone." It may bring down the bitterest curse of a "reprobate mind."

He seems to have rolled quickly down into this slough. He speaks of this murder-but with no distress, or pain, or penitence, or shame. Unblushingly he trumpets forth his deed. Unfeelingly he shows his blood-stained hands, as if they were some trophy of illustrious deed.

Ah! when conscience is thus seared, where is the fiend more vile than man! Earth still may be his home, but hell is within! Lamech is a proof. His heart next shows abandoned desperation. He abuses God's long-suffering. He takes it as a weapon to fight the more against Him. Because God is patient, he becomes more sinful. Divine goodness, as the sun shining on a putrid mass, draws out its vileness. Cain for a while had found a respite. He was not cast down instantly into the pit. Avenging lightnings drove him not headlong to his bed of fire. Life was prolonged. No, an especial shield was for a season spread around. This patience on the part of God foments the basest thoughts in Lamech. He pleads this case. His distorting mind concludes that he was less in crime than his progenitor. He dreams the beguiling dream--if Cain were spared, surely I shall be so much more--if he received protection, surely greater impunity is my due. "If Cain shall be avenged seven-fold surely Lamech seventy and seven-fold."

All this is very black. This conduct touches the last confines of wickedness. How different are hearts broken by the Spirit! Grace always hangs a lowly head, and wails in dust and ashes, and sees the inward blackness, and in its holiest actings still laments, "Sinners! of whom I am chief."

But it is nature's base propensity to view self in a blinding mirror. Keen to see others' fault, it has no eye for home iniquities. Sightless as to self, it mis-reads, also, the mind of God. From the sweet flower of God's forbearance, it extracts the direst poison. God spares in mercy. This tender goodness is abused, as if He neither saw nor cared. The wrath withheld is counted as indifference. The hand, which smites not, is despised as powerless. *Reprieve* is construed to be *acquittal*. Execution delayed is presumed on as impunity. Patience, the gentle guide to penitence, misleads to hard indifference. The lengthened space is filled not with amendments, but more vile transgressions. Reluctance to take vengeance is insulted, as license to prolong iniquity. The Spirit's warning is verified, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil." Eccles. 8:11.

Thus Lamech heaped up wrath against the day of wrath. Thus, also, the men of his dark days sinned with presumptuous hand. Eliphaz depicts their conduct and their end--

Yet you say, 'What does God know?
Does he judge through such darkness?
Thick clouds veil him, so he does not see us
as he goes about in the vaulted heavens.'
Will you keep to the old path

that evil men have trod?
They were carried off before their time,
their foundations washed away by a flood.
They said to God, 'Leave us alone!
What can the Almighty do to us?' Job 22:13-17

Reader! where is baseness like the baseness of thus *trampling on mercy*? Its language is, 'Because God is good, I will be viler yet--because He grants me longer space, I will the more defy Him.' Where is folly like unto this folly? It misinterprets God's loveliest attribute. It draws aggravated guilt out of these wells of grace. Where is madness like unto this madness? It rushes on the thick bosses of Almighty wrath. It adds fury to the penal flames. It sharpens the gnawing of the deathless worm. For though avenging feet may tardily advance, avenging hands will strike at last more heavily.

O you despisers! tremble and turn. Fall low on knees of penitence. Marvel that you yet live. Bless God, that yet you may repent and pray. Give thanks, that Christ yet offers pardon. But delay not another moment. Remember Lamech, and perish not.

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