

Genesis 4:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

Analysis

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a... This passage belongs to the primeval history section (Genesis 1-11) which establishes universal truths about God, humanity, sin, and divine purposes before focusing on Abraham and Israel. These chapters answer fundamental questions about human origins, the spread of wickedness, God's judgment, and the preservation of a righteous remnant.

Recurring patterns emerge: human sin escalating from individual disobedience to societal corruption, divine patience followed by judgment, gracious preservation of a remnant, and covenant promises ensuring redemptive purposes continue. The genealogies connect historical persons, demonstrate the fulfillment of divine promises (blessing and multiplication), and trace the line leading to Abraham and ultimately Christ.

Key theological themes in this section include:

1. sin's destructive progression affecting all humanity
2. God's righteous judgment while preserving mercy
3. human pride and autonomy opposing divine sovereignty
4. cultural development as both blessing and potential idolatry
5. God's sovereign plan advancing despite human rebellion.

These narratives provide the necessary context for understanding God's calling of Abraham and the covenant promises through which all nations will be blessed.

Historical Context

The primeval history (Genesis 1-11) parallels ancient Near Eastern traditions including Sumerian King Lists (pre-flood longevity), Akkadian flood traditions (Atrahasis, Gilgamesh), and Mesopotamian city foundation myths. However, Genesis demythologizes these traditions, presenting monotheistic history rather than polytheistic mythology. The genealogies connecting Adam to Noah to Abraham provide historical framework absent in pagan myths.

Archaeological evidence confirms ancient urbanization (chapter 4's cities), agricultural development, metallurgy, and musical instruments emerging in Mesopotamia's early history. The Babel account reflects Mesopotamian ziggurat construction (stepped pyramid temples), particularly in Babylon. Linguistic diversity requiring explanation was obvious to ancient peoples, making the Babel narrative culturally relevant.

For Israel in covenant with Yahweh, these chapters explained their relationship to surrounding nations. All peoples descended from Noah, but Israel descended from Shem through Abraham—chosen for blessing all nations. The flood demonstrated God's justice and mercy: judging wickedness while preserving the righteous. This pattern would recur throughout Israel's history, assuring them that God's covenant faithfulness endures despite judgment on the wicked.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?
2. How should this truth about City Building shape our daily decisions and priorities?
3. How does this passage point forward to Christ and the gospel of redemption?

Interlinear Text

כִּי	תַּעֲבֹד	אַתָּה	הָאָדָם	לֹא	תַּסְתִּין	תַּתְּנִית
When	thou tillest	H853	the ground	H3808	it shall not henceforth	yield
H3588	H5647		H127		H3254	H5414
עֲלָתֶךָ	לְבָנֶךָ	עַד	לְעַד	לְלִבְנָה	לְקָרְבָּן	
unto thee her strength	H0	a fugitive	and a vagabond	H1961		
H3581		H5128	H5110			
בְּאָרֶץ:						
shalt thou be in the earth						
	H776					

Additional Cross-References

Hosea 9:17 (Parallel theme): My God will cast them away, because they did not hearken unto him: and they shall be wanderers among the nations.

Leviticus 26:20 (Parallel theme): And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.

Leviticus 26:36 (Parallel theme): And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth.

