

Genesis 4:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

Analysis

And the LORD said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold... 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

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does this verse contribute to the biblical doctrine of creation, fall, or redemption?
2. What specific changes in thinking or behavior does this verse call us to make?
3. How does understanding Christ as the ultimate fulfillment illuminate this passage's meaning?

Interlinear Text

הָרָגָה	לְכָל	לְכָל	אָמָר	וְיִהְיֶה	הָרָגָה
whosoever	slayeth				
said	And the LORD	unto him Therefore	set	And the LORD	
H559	H3068	H3651	H7760	H3068	
לְקָרְבָּן	שְׁבֻעָת	וְיִקְרָב	וְיִשְׁמַר	וְיִהְיֶה	
Cain	on him sevenfold	vengeance shall be taken	set	And the LORD	
H7014	H7659	H5358	H7760	H3068	
מְצָאָה	כָּל	אַתְּ	לְבָלָת	אַתְּ	לְקָרְבָּן
any	finding		him should kill	lest	Cain
H4672	H3605	H853	H5221	H1115	H226

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 9:4 (References Lord): And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof.

Psalms 79:12 (References Lord): And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.

Genesis 4:24 (Parallel theme): If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

Ezekiel 9:6 (Parallel theme): Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark; and

begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house.

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