

## DAILY BIBLE ILLUSTRATIONS

by

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Fourth Week -- Wednesday

LAMECH

*"And Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah" (Genesis 4:19).*

Lamech had his troubles, as a man with two wives was likely to have. But whether or not his troubles grew directly out of his polygamy is not clearly disclosed. We know them only through an address which he makes to his two wives. The subject matter of this address is hard to be understood, but there is no mistaking as to its form, which embodies the parallelism and other characteristics of Hebrew poetry. This is the most ancient piece of poetry in the world, the only scrap of verse that has come to us from the ages before the flood.

The lines have been variously translated. We give them thus:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice!  
Wives of Lamech, receive my speech!  
If I slew a man to my wounding,  
And a young man to my hurt:  
If Cain was avenged seven times,  
Then Lamech seventy times seven."

To what do these words refer? Almost every possible sense has been assigned by different commentators. The Jewish tradition, preserved in the Midrash, is founded upon the mention of Cain and the interpretation that the promise to Cain was not that vengeance should be exacted seven-fold upon any one that slew him, but that vengeance should not be taken until the seventh generation, which generation Lamech represented. The story is that Lamech, being blind (to account for his not seeing "the mark" upon Cain), slew his ancestor with a dart or arrow under the direction of his son Tubal-Cain, who took the movements in the woods as made by Cain lurking there. But when the truth was discovered, Lamech, in his horror at the deed, slew the son whose misdirection had brought this crime upon his soul. His son was thus "the young man" to whom the verse refers. Now it is true that it was not promised to Cain that he should never be slain; but if he were slain, then seven-fold vengeance should be exacted for him. But as for the rest of the story, it is not likely that blind men went hunting even before the deluge. And the story has other improbabilities too obvious to need pointing out. Nor more

need be said.

Josephus did not receive this tradition, if it existed in his time. Instead, he gives a favorable turn to the whole matter by observing that Lamech, who saw as far as any man into the course and method of Divine justice, felt great concern in the prospect of that judgment which he apprehended to hang over his family for the murder of Abel. Under the force of that apprehension, Lamech spoke of the matter to his wives. It is on this hint that Shuckford, followed by others, appears to have founded his view of these verses. He thinks that the death of Abel had occasioned a complete alienation between the family of Seth and that of Cain, who, although living apart, were kept in constant fear that a bloody vengeance would some day be exacted. But Lamech, when he came to be the head of a people, sought to reason them out of their fear by the argument contained in his words. These words are understood to mean that if seven-fold vengeance were denounced upon the slayer of Cain--a man who murdered his own brother!--then there must surely be a far sorer punishment for any man who might attempt to destroy one of Lamech's family just because he was of the line of Cain. However, the fault of this interpretation is that it is too vague and hypothetical, and that it has no sufficiently pointed application to the words of the text.

Our own impression, coinciding with that of Lowth, is that Lamech had slain in self-defense some man by whom he had been assaulted and wounded. His wives feared the exaction of blood-revenge by the friends of the man who had been killed. However, Lamech puts his own *justifiable* homicide on the proper footing by contrasting it with the *deliberate* murder committed by Cain. He argues that the difference of the offense rendered the danger of vengeance in his own case very small, for if the life of Cain were protected by the penalty of seven-fold vengeance, surely his would be protected by a penalty of seventy times seven.