

The Year of the Bible

Failed to Reboot

Genesis 4-11; Romans 1:18-25

Dr. Matt Cassidy --- February 2, 2020

Today we're going to look at the human condition, and it's summarized in a single Hebrew word: *timshel*. It's found in Genesis chapter 4. Part of our study is the study of the flood.

Genesis 4:6-7

So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you may rule over it."

It starts in chapter 4, verse 6. It says, "So the Lord, YHWH, says to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you may rule over it.'"

Timshel --- you may. You should rule over it. You can rule over it. Sin is at your door, it is crouching to rule you, but you may rule it.

John Steinbeck's book *East of Eden* is written entirely around this Hebrew word: *timshel*. Sin lies at the door. Its desire is for you, but you may ...

In Genesis chapters 4 through 11 --- we'll survey that today --- but we're talking about the condition of the human soul. Yes, humanity, but our soul, my soul. It is fallen, living east of Eden. We are bent, we are twisted deeply. Every single one of us. And we can't fix this. It started with the temptation when Satan said, "You surely will not die."

And the story is death. The history of man is the history of death. When we look at the big picture that we've studied so far, paradise is found, given, and then paradise is lost. And now we look at the cost of that.

Paradise found --- we see in the first two chapters of Genesis where we are meant to and designed to know God and to love God. We were made to love each other recklessly, without boundaries, and never fearing any kind of injury. We were given meaning and purpose. Take

these beautiful things and turn them into something extravagant. And do that for other people and for God himself. That's paradise.

And then paradise was lost. Adam and Eve, the first family, the two humans that have had an unusual sense of freedom that has never been seen since then --- they violated the only prohibition --- "Do not take from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." Because Satan said, "Surely you will not die." A king and a queen --- but it was not enough. They thought that God had something that He was withholding. And so, all is lost. All that was meant to live is now in death. And now we serve an unholy trinity - this is our bent and this is our twist --- me, myself, and I. That's who we serve. Our souls are turned in and there's always something for me in this. And we did this and we cannot fix it. And so, the story of the fall ends with God saying, "I'll fix this. I'll intervene." And He makes a promise to Adam and to Eve and says, "A son of Eve will someday come and crush the head of Satan and all of evil."

And Eve is so committed to that promise, she probably believes that her firstborn, her son, is that fulfillment --- Cain. He's the one. My first child. And the message of chapters 4 through 11 --- for you to understand the power and the passion of 4 through 11, not just what it says, but what it means --- is this. That this new world, living east of Eden --- entropy rules all created things. Everything is now approaching and careening towards chaos. Every single atom, every thought, every intention --- chaos. You will die. It's a descent into hell and we can't stop it from happening. We don't have the power to do that.

In Genesis 4 through 11 the outline goes like this. **It is a story of the world of death; it is a story of God's grief, a story of God's judgment, a story of God's help.** It's a mood, it's a theme, it's a message --- a story of death. Cain's first words --- this is the hope of Adam and Eve --- Cain's first words, because this is who he is; he says to his younger brother Abel, "Let us go out into the field." And Abel never returns. Cain kills Abel. And in the confrontation between Cain and God, there are two questions and two answers. God, hoping for some kind of confession, says, "Where is your brother Abel? Where is your brother? Where is Abel?" And Cain says to God Almighty in His holiness and His authority, "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

The gall. He did know. And as a matter of fact, he is his brother's keeper. We are all to be keeping after each other. And so, this is the curse of Cain. This is what he hears from God.

Genesis 4:10-12

But the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen! Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! ¹¹ Now you are cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed your brother’s blood. ¹² No longer will the ground yield good crops for you, no matter how hard you work! From now on you will be a homeless wanderer on the earth.”

YHWH says, “What have you done? Listen, your brother’s blood cries out from the ground, and now you’re cursed and banished from the ground, which has swallowed up your brother’s blood. And no longer will the ground yield the good crops for you no matter how hard you work it. For now you will be a homeless wanderer all over the earth.

And Cain hears this and weeps bitterly and replies to YHWH, saying, “Oh, the punishment for me is too great to bear. You have banished me from the land and from Your presence. You have made me a homeless wanderer. And now anyone who finds me will kill me.”

And when you read that in Genesis chapter 4, you need to listen. This is not repentance. This is not someone saying, *Oh, sin was crouching at the door and desired to rule me and I couldn’t stop. So could you help me? I need You to help me rule this sin.* No. That’s not what he’s saying. This is not repentance. This is regret. His weeping is *I can’t believe I got caught. And I don’t want these consequences.* Listen to what he’s afraid of: because I don’t want someone else to do to me what I did to my brother Abel. I can’t live with that.

Story: A World of Death

And so, it says that he leaves the presence of the Lord, verse 16, and goes farther east of Eden and forms a city there. And eventually, as the story goes, one of his first descendants that’s noteworthy, that’s brought to our attention, is Lamech. And Lamech’s first words of description are this: “And Lamech had two wives.” He’s the first in a series of polygamous relationships. He’s the first to set a standard of an abuse of power and the purpose of marriage, a violation of intimacy and trust. From now on we’ll see polygamy and there’s not one story that is successful. And Lamech starts it. And why does he have two wives? Because he can. Who’s going to stop him?

Genesis 4:23-24

One day Lamech said to his wives, “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; listen to me, you wives of Lamech. I have killed a man who attacked me, a teenager who bruised me. ²⁴ If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times, then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!”

The first words of Lamech – and this is who he is --- are this: “One day Lamech said to his wives, ‘Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; listen to me, you wives of Lamech. I have killed a man who attacked me, a teenager who bruised me. If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times, then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!’”

Oh, Lamech, sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is to rule you. And he says, *Rule me? I yield to it. I bathe myself in that sin. I will never release this anger within me. I will feed it instead. We live in a world where might makes right. And I’m the mightiest, and so I make the rules. You listen to me, wives. Tell your friends this. If some teenage kid bruises my foot, I’ll kill him. Sin is crouching at my door, it wants to rule me. Bring it.*

That’s the story of Lamech. And this is the beginning of the history of man, and the history of man is the history of death. Brother killing brother, tribe killing tribe, nation killing nation. We did this and we can’t stop doing it. Sin’s desire is hatred is violence and we continue and perpetuate in our souls, sometimes with cleverness, but always serving that unholy trinity of me, myself, and I. The genealogies are written in Genesis chapter 4 and part of chapter 5, and they’re not genealogies of life where people are giving birth. They are genealogies of death. Sin is crouching at the door and wants to rule over you. Its desire is for that. But you may --- you may --- rule it --- *timshel*.

Oscar Wilde knew this. Oscar Wilde, a famous atheistic nihilist, said this: “When the gods want to punish us, they answer our prayers.” He knew that the nature of the human soul was so dark that if we get whatever we want, we get what we deserve. And it destroys us.

Natalie Merchant --- remember her and the 10,000 Maniacs in the nineties? Remember that song --- “Hey, if lust and hate are their candy, then hey, give them what they want!” Just give them what they want.

Paul said it like this in Romans chapter 1. He said, “And then God gave them over to their passions.” And they just continued this descent into darkness into hell, doing what their sin has desiring for them to be, and this is bottom.

Genesis 6:5

The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.

Genesis chapter 6, verse 5: “And YHWH observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.”

Let me just repeat --- look how conflicted --- it’s all-pervasive. “And the Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.”

It is hard to imagine what that is like. And only because we are here now in the history of human experience. Honestly, we are in this bubble, a very unique bubble. At least if you’re American and in the suburbs, you have a difficult time understanding or imagining that this is true or what it looks like. Because in the history of mankind there has never been this prolonged experience of safety and security. You have to interview a veteran or maybe a first responder to see this darkness that’s always been there. And it’s still here now. If you look at just a passing glance of history, it is all written in blood. Because the history of man is the history of death. Every once in a while --- I’ve been studying this for years, and when there’s a book that grasps what this is like --- there was a bestselling book a number of years ago. It’s called *The Road*. Some of you may have read it. If you want to know what Genesis chapter 6, verse 5, looked like, it was turned into a movie. Put your kids to bed, turn out the lights, watch this movie. Oh, it’s a horror movie. It is so scary. It is threateningly scary and here’s why: because there’s no boogie man. There’s just man. And sin is crouching at the door and its desire for man --- might makes right --- and man says, *Timshel. I won’t. I won’t rule over it.*

Story: God's Grief

This is our condition. Every thought, every imagination that we have is constantly and totally on evil. And you know you've grasped the mood and the meaning of Moses' writings in this chapter of 4 and 5 and 6. If you find yourself yelling at the Bible and screaming to God for the love of God and all things holy, *Will someone just end all of this? Will someone just start this whole thing over?* And that's how you get to the story of the flood --- is yelling, *Somebody stop this!*

Now, what's surprising in the story of the flood is not the thoroughness of the judgment. It's not about the wrath of God. That's not what will surprise you. It's actually just a phrase that's often overlooked. And it's this – it's the distress of God. That's what the story is about. It's the anguish that God is experiencing. The word that will be used is “grief” and that means “unfulfilled longing for something more.” And that's why the second part of the story is the story of God's grief.

Genesis 6:5

The LORD observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil. ⁶ So the LORD regretted He had ever made them and put them on the earth, and it grieved God to His heart.

In Genesis chapter 6, verse 5, it says, “YHWH observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and He saw everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.” And then look how God responds. “YHWH regretted that He had ever made them and put them on the earth, and it grieved God to His heart.” It grieved God to His heart.

Some translations; here's others. “It brought God bitter anguish.” “He was deeply troubled in His soul.” What does that even mean? It's hard to even conceive of God having that depth of anguish. What it means is that God volitionally chose to attach His soul's delight or sorrow to us. He has chosen --- He doesn't need us, He doesn't have to do this --- He created us, but He involved himself deeply in our well-being. Again, He could look at us on this little blue marble in space like some little kid with an ant farm. And He sees what's happening and He kind

of throws it into the fire. What does He care? But that's not what this verse says. It says that His soul is anguished.

It also means this. That when God grieves in this story, He's grieving the entirety of the damage of death. "Surely you will not die." And God: "No, you will die." You don't even comprehend the fullness of what death means. It's death: body, soul, and spirit. It's a holistic, full expression of what is not, what is meant to be. And so, everything is damaged in this sin crouching at the door and not ruling over it. The axe head that felled the tree is pitted by the tree's sap. He feels the suffering of the victim and the perpetrator.

C. S. Lewis said in *Mere Christianity*, "The Nazis killed the Jews because they hated them. And then the Nazis hated the Jews because they killed them." The Nazis hated the Jews, and so they killed them; the Nazis hated the Jews because they killed them. They thought they could do things and their souls wouldn't be altered. And when they realized they were, they hated them still more, because they're bent and they're twisted and they're deeply so.

Socrates said it's better to be robbed than a robber. If you are robbed, you lose stuff. If you are a robber, you've lost some image of God.

And so, God sees this and He decides and chooses to feel this. "You shall surely die." And so, the history of man is the history of death. That's our point of view. According to this verse, Yale professor of philosophy Nicholas Wolterstorff says that the history of man is the tears of God. While the history of man is the history of death, the history of man is the tears of God. And now all of creation longs with death pangs for someone to do something to stop this.

Story: God's Judgment

And so, that moves us to the third section of the story, the third movement --- it's the story of God's judgment. And you probably know that story. But I want you to see that there's poetry in the justice; that God is making sure that we all understand that what He's giving is what they were dealing.

The Hebrew word for "corrupt" is the word "destroy." And so, I'm just going to insert the word "destroy" so that you see the poetic justice that God is distributing in the context of this judgment.

Genesis 6:11-13

Now God saw that the earth had become corrupt and was filled with violence. ¹² God observed all this corruption in the world, for everyone on earth was corrupt. ¹³ So God said to Noah, “I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence.

Chapter 6, verses 11 through 13 says, “Now God saw that the earth had become destroyed and was filled with violence. And so, God observed all the destruction in the world, for everyone on earth was destructive. And so, God said to Noah, ‘I have decided to destroy all living creatures, for they have filled the earth with violence.’”

Do you see what He’s saying? *I’m destroying all the destruction. I’m going to destroy those who are destroying. I’m going to kill death.* They dealt this --- they’re going to have to live with this, the eyewitness. And so, the story of His judgment is just speeding up what was going to happen anyway, all of the destruction.

So, the story of the flood, as you may know, is Noah, this one holy family that is preserved. They build an ark and they’re in the ark. They wait for God’s timing and then there’s a flood for forty days. It rains from the sky and from the land beneath. And for forty days this takes place. The flood story is a de-creation story. It is a re-creation story. So, after the forty days of flooding they spend 150 days where it says that the waters covered the earth. And in that, it’s supposed to remind us of the early part of the creation story where there was nothing but water and chaos was the description of this planet. Then the next 190 days the water abates. And that story sounds very similar to the creation story where now land comes along and there’s foliage and there’s a recreation. And the high point of the recreation story is after almost a year on the ark, Abraham sets foot on land. And the first thing he does is to build an altar and he gives a sacrifice of thanksgiving. And it says, “Then Noah built an altar to YHWH, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that very purpose.” And in this re-creation it’s a story of God and how He helps us --- a story of God’s help.

Story: God's Help

Genesis 8:21

And the LORD was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things.”

Now the story tells us three things God gives us to continue our lives together. First is a promise --- **God gives a promise.** “YHWH was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, ‘I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood.’” Still --- everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. “ ‘I will never again destroy all living things.’”

And so, we have that promise. The covenant sign is the rainbow so that we can all be assured that God will judge all living things in that way again.

Genesis 9:5-6

“And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. ⁶If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands For God made human beings in His own image.

The second thing He gives us in this new creation is the gift of government. In chapter 9, verse 5 He says, “And I will require the blood of anyone who takes another person’s life. If a wild animal kills a person, it must die. And anyone who murders a fellow human must die. If anyone takes a human life, that person’s life will also be taken by human hands. For God made human beings in His own image.”

And this section right here is called the gift of government. It's for the purpose of civilizing man. Because man can't govern himself, God gives government. And what it means is a delegation of authority from God to have rights that individuals don't have. In that delegation of authority, you are also accountable directly to God for that increased authority. So, God gives government so that we will withhold ourselves --- maybe that will help us from destroying each other. The government has things --- every government is delegated by God. Every government is accountable to God. If you hurt my family or kill one of my family members and I come and chase you down and kill you, that's not justice. That's revenge or vigilantism, right? The government can do that because they have authority. If I grab you and put you in a cage for some period of time because you did something wrong, that's wrong. It's evil. I don't have a right for that. If the government does that righteously, they can because they're given that authority.

Now here's an application that's kind of over here, but what that means is that every person playing a part in government from the meter maid to the Oval Office, in every context, is given that authority by God in this covenant, in this gift of government. And everyone from the meter maid to the Oval Office is directly accountable for that different kind of authority they've been granted by God.

Genesis 9:1

Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth."

We're given a promise, and we're given government in an attempt to hold back this sin, and then **God gives us a command, a re-creation command.** "And God blessed Noah and his sons and He told them, 'Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth.'" It's repeated again later. And I'm sure when you read that you're thinking that you know the story of the first creation and you think, *Oh, right, it's a re-creation story. It has this new promise. We have a new Adam with a new mandate and here we go. Maybe we'll get it right this time.*

That's our motions. That's where we're going. And this story has an ominous end to it. Because with this new Adam and this new hope, we find he's in a new garden. And Noah plants a vineyard and drinks the wine and gets stupid drunk and lays naked before his children. And now nakedness re-enters the story and it's not about being unashamed, but rather, shame, and it's

somehow about indecency. And so, the story ends with hope and then our hope is crashed. And the reason is because the soul, the human heart, is bent and it is twisted deeply, and we cannot fix it. We broke this. We did this but we can't make it better. And rainbows and government will not make it well. That's the point of Genesis 4 through 11. That's the storyline.

We're supposed to see two things, something about God and something about us. When we look at God in this story, we see a creator that is weeping and suffering with us, even more so than us. The history of man is the history of death. But the history of man is the tears of God. When we see this, we see God in the fullness of His anguish when He sees what we do. *Timshel* - if you choose. But we don't.

The second thing we're to learn from this about the nature of the human soul. And by that I want to be very clear here. I don't mean mankind and I don't even mean us --- I mean me and I mean you. This passage of Scripture is to teach us that we were meant for so much more but we are bent. We are twisted. Today we would say this --- this might help. We are addicted. We are all addicted to sin and it is crouching at our door and its desire is for us. We are addicted to that. And if you're thinking chemical, you are missing the point of the story; you're missing the point of self-revelation. We are addicted to pride. We are bent. We are made --- some of you might know yourself well enough to know you were born lazy. You're addicted to lazy or pride or vanity or conceit or lust or insecurity or fear. And every day you feel it happening to you. Here's the thing --- it is crouching at your door and its desire is for you. The problem with addiction is, sometimes, early on, we learn how that can serve us. And the nature of addiction is that it won't stay there. Then you serve it. It rules you.

How do you rule an addiction? If this bent and this twist is defined as an addiction, how do you rule that like it says. How does *timshel* apply? I have a friend, one of my workout buddies, and he's twenty-something years sober. He's an authority on addiction. He has a center here in Central Texas. He and his wife both speak internationally on the subject. His wife has been interviewed on several national television shows. And so, one time after our workout I said, "How does addiction work? How do people overcome that?"

He said, "Well, you probably heard that the first step is the hardest step. The reason people are addicted is ... first of all, everyone's addicted to multiple things. They think they can rule it, but they can't, and they just need to get to that place where they realize it's bigger than them. But people live their whole lives not living the lives they were meant to live. And here's

why. Either they say, 'I'm not an addict,' or 'I got this.' So, he said, "Most of the work is right there. It's coming to the realization of what this passage says, that we're bent and that's it bigger than us, we're twisted, and we're addicted to this sin."

And I said --- this is how it came up --- I said, "If you were a son of Adam, if you were a daughter of Eve, you realize that's the point where sin is crouching at your door all the time to continually drive you towards this insanity. Can you acknowledge that?" So, I asked him, "I have an acquaintance and this really disturbs me, because he was something like ten or eleven years sober, and then he overdosed on heroin, just like that. And I just don't understand how you can go so long and then have that happen. Can you help me understand that part of the addictive life?"

And he said, "Oh, sure, yeah. It takes ten minutes."

I said, "What?"

He said, "Yeah, it takes ten minutes. Look, here's the thing. This is how an addict lives. This is how a person *timshels* over an addiction." He says, "It's ten minutes a day. You start your day and you center yourself." These are his words. "You center yourself. You admit that you have an addiction and it's bigger and stronger than you and God is stronger than that addiction and I'm going to live the rest of the day with those truths in mind." And at the end of the day they have to journal at his place. You have to journal first thing in the morning and it's the last thing you do. And you have to admit two things, that you have an addiction and it has a desire for you and it's going to destroy you, but you may be *timshel*, rule over it, if God is bigger than that. You acknowledge that.

I said, "Okay. What is the ten minutes about?"

He said, "Well, look, guys come back to our place. They have to reapply and all this. And they'll say, 'Oh, yeah, I relapsed' --- let's just say --- 'June 1st. I did the cocaine' or whatever they do." And he says, "Well, give me your journal." And he takes their journal and says, "Oh, according to your journal you relapsed in February, not June. Because in February was your last journal entry. Somewhere around February 2nd you quit acknowledging, you woke up February 3rd and you didn't say that you were an addict. You didn't say you needed a higher power to *timshel*. You thought you were cured. And so, on February 2nd you relapsed. You just didn't do your drug until June 1st."

You see? He just looks at this and says that his values in this book say this. He says that sin is crouching at your door. Do you know this about you? Its desire is for you, but you may rule it.

The reason Jesus Christ came to die and be raised again was to pay for our sins so that the Spirit of God could live in our souls so that every day we could wake up and say, "Sin is stronger than me, but not stronger than the Spirit that lives within me." He had to clean our souls and make it righteous so that the Spirit could live in us so that we would not have to live the life that Cain lived, but we have to do this. Jesus said, "I came that you might have life and might have it abundantly." He didn't mean the next life. "I came that you might have life, have it abundantly, right now, today. But ... if this ... if you acknowledge this: that sin, a sin, these addictions, are always crouching at your door and its desire is for you. And if, you may ... if you acknowledge and surrender, you may rule it.

The abundant life that Jesus promised is contingent. It is contingent on absolute surrender to the glory of God and Him working in your life. Genesis chapters 4 through 11 has this message: we are very broken. We're deeply bent. But we don't have to live that way anymore. We can choose to live by the power of the Spirit of God if we surrender. *Timshel* ... you may. That's my prayer for us. Let's pray that, okay?

Dear Lord Jesus, You came not to just pay for our sins, but to leave us Your Spirit. "I must leave so that the helper can come and do things that I could never do." The Spirit could, if we surrender, allow us to live the abundant life that you promised. So, I'd ask that You would help us acknowledge this, that we are addicted to _____, and we will be addicted to that until the day we see You face to face. And the desire of that addiction is to destroy us and mock us. And so, now, Lord, I pray that we now longer bathe in that, we no longer surrender to that, but we choose to allow Your Spirit to rule that by our surrender to Your desires. We turn towards You. Lord, we give You our lives. We surrender as a church to You, that we might enjoy a little taste of paradise in this life. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.