



JUBAL: Music as Fulfillment of the Cultural Mandate

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Music is unavoidable. On an average day just about anywhere in the world, one encounters music, even in the simplest forms, from street performers with home-made instruments in developing countries to sold-out stadiums with star-studded ensembles to the ubiquitous and oft-annoying jingles heard on advertisements across our media. Writing in 1909, German scholar Carl Heinrich Cornill declares:

Music belongs to the inalienable rights of man. It is the effort to make one's self intelligible to his fellow men by means of the stimulation of sounds of all kinds. Music exists wherever men are found upon earth and everywhere they show a genuine refinement in the discovery of means by which to originate sounds. There is hardly anything that can not be brought into use for its purposes.²

But from where did music originate? Two theories emerged from antiquity, one with roots in Greek reason and mythology and the other from Genesis 4.³ It will be the assumption of this article that the account in the first book of the Pentateuch, chronicling the invention of musical instruments by Jubal, a descendant of Cain, is historically accurate and true.

This article will attempt to present the invention of musical instruments as described in Genesis as an apologetic for three key ideas: the presence

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²Carl Heinrich Cornill, "Music in the Old Testament. Lecture Given for the Benefit of the Home for Aged Music Teachers at Breslau, February 9, 1906," *The Monist* 19, no. 2 (April 1909): 240–64.

³Paul E. Beichner, *The Medieval Representative of Music: Jubal or Tubalcain?* (Notre Dame, IN: The Mediaeval Institute, University of Notre Dame, 1954). Throughout the church age, many scholars have synthesized the two accounts; see James W. McKinnon, "Jubal vel Pythagoras, *Quis Sit Inventor Musicae?*" *The Musical Quarterly* 64, no. 1 (January 1978): 1–28.

of common grace, music as an essential development by image-bearers in God's good creation, and the sober reality that mere technological progress, while a fulfillment of the cultural mandate, is not enough to solve humankind's deepest needs.

COMMON GRACE AND THE CULTURAL MANDATE

It is not the purpose of this article to argue, in detail, the Mosaic authorship of Genesis. However, it is the assumption here that Jesus's affirmation of the pen of the patriarch is correct (John 5:46). John Walton characterizes this position: "The founder of Israel is the most probable person to transmute its national repository of ancient traditions into a coherent history in order to define the nation and its mission."⁴ Writing to the people of God as they emerged out of Egypt, Moses, having been schooled in the finest of Egyptian educations (Acts 7:22), sought to reframe their thinking away from the myths and origin stories they undoubtedly imbibed from centuries in this pagan land and that characterized the surrounding nations and reorient them toward God's revelation of himself as Creator and Lord.⁵ "The purpose of the Torah in this section," Umberto Cassuto writes, "is to teach us that the whole world and all that it contains were created by the word of the One God, according to His will, which operates without restraint. It is thus opposed to the concepts current among the peoples of the ancient East, who were Israel's neighbors, and in some respects is in conflict with certain ideas that had already found their way into the ranks of our people."⁶ Walton concurs, asserting that "Moses of necessity would have given Israel its prior history, meaning and destiny as well as its laws. Every political and/or religious community must have a memory of history that defines and distinguishes it."⁷

In telling Israel her own origin story, embedded in the larger origin story of the human race (including the fall in the garden in Genesis 3), Moses's narrative continues through the first part of Genesis as a parallel story whose antecedent is in the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15: "I will put hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel" (CSB). Emerging with Cain's murder of his brother Abel in Genesis 4, the

⁴John H. Walton, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 22–23.

⁵Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis. Part 1, From Adam to Noah: A Commentary on Genesis I–VI, VIII*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1979), 7–18.

⁶Cassuto, *Commentary*, 7.

⁷Walton, *Genesis*, 22–23.

subtheme of human violence continues to develop until it culminates in the flood narrative in Genesis 6–9 (though one might argue that it continues as a subtheme throughout Scripture until John’s Revelation about the end of the age). As Derek Kidner affirms, “Chapters 1–11 [of Genesis] describe two opposite progressions: first, God’s orderly creation, to its climax in man as a responsible and blessed being, and then the disintegrating work of sin, to its first great anti-climax in the corrupt world of the flood, and its second in the folly of Babel.”⁸

The clash between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is brought into sharp relief in the dual geologies presented in Genesis 4 and 5. Cain’s rebel lineage (Gen. 4:17–22) is contrasted with the righteous line of Seth (Gen. 4:25–5:32), Abel’s divinely appointed surrogate. This narrative advances toward the wickedness of the former overtaking the latter in Genesis 6, necessitating God’s saving and cleansing action in the judgment of the flood.

For the purposes of this article, we will focus on the line of Cain and, specifically, the invention of musical instruments by his pagan progeny. Genesis 4 details humankind’s dual descent, both into further depravity and further innovation. It is the former that often occupies our attention, but the latter is just as important, chronicled as it is by Moses in Genesis 4:19–22:

Lamech took two wives for himself, one named Adah and the other named Zillah. Adah bore Jabal; he was the first of the nomadic herdsmen. His brother was named Jubal; he was the first of all who play the lyre and the flute. Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. Tubal-cain’s sister was Naamah.

Here, tucked inconspicuously into a genealogy, are three world-shaping developments that come from Cain’s offspring: (1) the invention of the domestication of livestock, (2) the invention of metallurgy, and (3) the invention of music. Though these are the works of a rapidly paganizing cohort, distinguished by Moses from the righteous remnant in Seth’s line, we should not be so quick to dismiss them as mere futile works done by faithless profligates. John Calvin asserts that here God’s common grace can be found:

⁸Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale, 1967), 16.

Let us then know, that the sons of Cain, though deprived of the Spirit of regeneration, were yet endued with gifts of no despicable kind; just as the experience of all ages teaches us how widely the rays of divine light have shone on unbelieving nations, for the benefit of the present life; and we see, at the present time, that the excellent gifts of the Spirit are diffused through the whole human race. Moreover, the liberal arts and sciences have descended to us from the heathen. We are, indeed, compelled to acknowledge that we have received astronomy, and the other parts of philosophy, medicine, and the order of civil government, from them. Nor is it to be doubted, that God has thus liberally enriched them with excellent favors that their impiety might have the less excuse.⁹

Here in Genesis 4, we see God receive glory from rebels, even as they continue to embrace the way of the serpent. The mandate (Gen. 1:26–28) to create is still operative, even in a fallen state. Often well-meaning but misguided Christians assume righteousness is equivalent to a primitive state of unspoiled wilderness. Yet, as evidenced by the editorial statement made by Moses in Genesis 2’s creation narrative—“there was no man to work the ground” (Gen. 2:5)—God’s desire is to see his creation move beyond the raw, untamed wilderness. The movement in Scripture’s telling of history is from a garden to a city, from Eden to the New Jerusalem.¹⁰ To this end, David Atkinson finds in Cain’s family God’s ironic, if not purposeful, means of cultivating the earth:

Civilization begins to grow outside the Garden. Even in the land of restlessness, there is culture, there is art. Surprisingly, it is through Cain the homeless, the fugitive, the prodigal, that God’s commission to his people to work and subdue creation begins to be established.¹¹

Perhaps Moses intended to help the people of God understand that

⁹John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1974), 218.

¹⁰See John Dyer, *From the Garden to the City: The Place of Technology in the Story of God*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2022).

¹¹David J. Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1–11* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 113.

much of what they took for granted in everyday life—the silver and gold and copper goods they took from the Egyptians, the livestock they shuffled through the wilderness and to the doorstep of Canaan, and the music they heard in Egypt and created in their own subculture—had roots, not in the pagan myths they had imbibed but in the innovation of image-bearers, many of whom nevertheless refused to worship the giver of gifts. Kidner sees that “God was to make much use of the Cainite techniques for his people, from the semi-nomadic discipline itself . . . to the civilized arts and crafts . . . [This] prepares us to accept for ourselves a similar indebtedness to secular enterprise.”¹² This innovation by pagan ingenuity, Tony Reinke convincingly argues, is not incidental: “God chose to channel his common grace through Cain’s lineage to bless the world. A murderous rebel and his rogue family became God’s choice for unleashing innovation into the world.”¹³ God spared Cain from death for the purpose of innovation.

These opening chapters of the Bible’s first book should teach contemporary Christians to appreciate God’s divine appointment of image-bearers who, while not acknowledging their Creator, still manage to produce marvelous inventions and innovations that enrich our lives. For example, this current article is being written on a sleek Macbook Pro laptop computer, produced from a company started by an eclectic inventor, the late Steve Jobs—a pagan at worst and a dabbler of spiritual oddities at best.¹⁴ Jobs’s unregenerate state did not prevent him from creating a company whose products assist in the heralding of the gospel by making the process of creation and innovation easier. As Atkinson expresses:

There is much to appreciate in the world of the arts and the sciences which bears witness to the common grace and enriching gifts of the Creator, even among those who do not acknowledge him, and would not attribute their skills to his enabling. Let us thank God that every expression of creativity and beauty, every advance of science, every new composition in music and every line of poetry, speak in some measure of the creative grace of God.¹⁵

¹²Kidner, *Genesis*, 85.

¹³Tony Reinke, *Competing Spectacles: Treasuring Christ in the Media Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 89.

¹⁴See Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2021).

¹⁵Atkinson, *Message of Genesis 1–11*, 114.

In Genesis 4, Moses is teaching that the creative grace of God often emerges from pagan hands.

MUSIC AS A NECESSITY OF THE CULTURAL MANDATE

If God's preservation of the line of Cain was essential for the continued cultivation of his creation, then it must be said that inclusion of music (alongside the domestication of animals and metallurgy) in the three cultural advances is noteworthy. A closer look at Jubal and music's biblical uses helps reveal the significance of music for culture and the people of God.

The name of Jubal (Gen. 4:21) has linguistic links to the word often used in the Old Testament to identify the instrument, a ram's horn, played to mark the start of Israel's year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8–12).¹⁶ Scholars differ on the exact nature of the instruments listed in Genesis 4:21 in relation to Jubal. The *kinnor*, often translated as "harp," could be either the two-sided triangular stringed instrument or the instrument with strings stretched over a wooden soundbox, or perhaps an antecedent of the later lyre, common in the ancient near east.¹⁷ This lyre was often played by David (e.g., 1 Sam. 16:23) and can resemble either a hand-held harp or a rudimentary lute.¹⁸ The pipe (*ugab*) might be a thin reed or flute or perhaps a panpipe, which is a rudimentary form of an organ, with multiple reeds in a box-like container.¹⁹ Some examples of flutes from the ancient near East have been discovered dating back to the third- and fourth-century BC.²⁰

Jubal's description as "the father of" those who play the lyre and pipe should be seen as him being identified by Moses as the first instrumental musician.²¹ That the development of music is included here with other developments such as domesticated livestock and metallurgy, two essentials of human life, tells us something significant about the way the Bible sees music. Thus, Harold Best and David Kutar identify Jubal as a "proto-musician" whose presence highlights "the attention given to music making this far back in sacred history, and ... its natural appearance along with other human and cultural activities."²²

¹⁶K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (Nashville: B&H, 1996), 287–88; Gordon John Wenham, *Genesis 1–15, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2017), 111.

¹⁷Jeremy Montagu, *Musical Instruments of the Bible* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 1.

¹⁸Joachim Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written and Comparative Sources*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 63.

¹⁹Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine*, 63–68.

²⁰Walton, *Genesis*, 276.

²¹Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 111.

²²Robert E. Webber, ed., *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, *The Biblical Foundations*

Here in Genesis 4, only seven generations after Adam, music is first mentioned in God's word.²³ Even in a fallen creation beset by thorns and thistles, the development of musical instruments from the raw materials God had bestowed on his image-bearers was inevitable and, one might argue, indispensable to human life. One scholar goes so far as to contend that "musical potential has been built into creation by the design of God."²⁴ Likewise, Reinke points to Jubal's innovation as not God's merely extracting some good from Cain's pagan line, but as an intentional aspect of his promise of cultural development.²⁵ Even Thomas Morell, the librettist for *Joshua* (a dramatic musical work by George Frederic Handel, the preeminent German composer of biblical oratorios) thought Jubal significant enough to reference him centuries later:

Oh, had I Jubal's lyre,
Or Miriam's tuneful voice!
To sounds like his I would aspire,
In songs like hers rejoice.
My humble strains but faintly show,
How much to Heav'n and thee I owe.²⁶

Through a pagan and rebel family, God initiated the development of music. Atkinson believes this is a sign that "God is concerned with the growth of art, of society, of technology even in a world which is homesick for him; even for people who are out of touch with his love."²⁷ This should teach Christians of all ages about music's often understated importance.

of Christian Worship (Nashville: Hendrickson, Star Song Publishing Group, 1993), 227.

²³Carl Heinrich Cornill, *Music in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1909).

²⁴Mark Lyman Taylor, "The Implications of the Biblical References to Music for Music Education in Evangelical Christian Schools" (PhD diss., Case Western Reserve University School of Graduate Studies, 1995), 93. Likewise, Peter Leithart links Jubal to the cultural mandate and the call to dominion over creation; see Peter Leithart, "Why Kings Sing: A Biblical Theology of Monarchs and Music," The Gospel Coalition, December 29, 2020, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/biblical-theology-monarchs-music/>.

²⁵See Tony Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021). Reinke states: "Jubal, the forefather of music and instruments, was created by God and ordained for this purpose, not simply to give amateurs something to play with, but to birth the industry of specialized musical professionals who master instruments for public celebration in bands and orchestras and the music industry" (90).

²⁶Ruth Smith, "Early Music's Dramatic Significance in Handel's 'Saul,'" *Early Music* 35, no. 2 (2007): 173–89.

²⁷Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1–11*, 114.

“If there is a consistent stand concerning music in the Old Testament,” Best and Huttar write, “it is that it is inseparable from all of life.”²⁸ Jeremy Begbie concurs, pointing out that Jubal’s inclusion in Genesis 4 “testifies not only to the importance of music—it is placed alongside other ‘necessary occupations’—but also to its embeddedness in practical, daily, common life.”²⁹

Later in the Old Testament, musical instruments play a central role in the story of Israel, from the trumpets blown at the fall of Jericho (Josh. 6) to the harp played by David to soothe King Saul’s mental state (1 Sam. 16) to “all kinds of . . . instruments” (2 Sam. 6:5) in David’s musical worship band leading to the variety of musical instruments played in Solomon’s Temple (2 Chron. 5:12–13). For the people of God, this ongoing development of music is even more significant. From creation’s raw materials we find, in every generation, new ways to praise the Creator. This is why, for instance, Psalm 150 urges the use of multiple instruments—harp, lyre, strings, and cymbals—for worship. Though the apostle Paul primarily urges the early church to “[sing] and [make] music with your heart” (Eph. 5:19, cf. Col. 3:16),³⁰ some instruments are mentioned repeatedly in the New Testament: the trumpet plays a prominent eschatological role (Matt. 24:31, 1 Cor. 15:22, 1 Thess. 4:16), and the harp is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 14:7 and features prominently in the depiction of heavenly worship (Rev. 5:8, 14:2, 15:2). Throughout the biblical canon, expressing devotion to God through music—often through the use of instruments that represent a cultivation of Eden’s raw materials—is part of the intentional act of worship both described and prescribed as the proper response for the called out people of God (Rom. 12:1–2).³¹

MERE TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS CANNOT FIX THE HUMAN HEART

Yet as much as Jubal represents God’s continuing fulfillment of the cultural mandate and specifically music’s role as indispensable ingredient of human flourishing, we cannot deny the somber notes in Genesis 4.

²⁸Webber, *The Complete Library of Christian Worship*, vol. 1, 227.

²⁹Jeremy Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 60.

³⁰See Begbie, *Resounding Truth*, 67–70. Begbie attributes this mainly to the early church’s roots in the synagogue and not as a prohibition on instruments for worship.

³¹James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 155–214.

Verses 23–24 record perhaps the first lyric put to music, Lamech’s celebration of violence:

Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
 wives of Lamech, pay attention to my words.
 For I killed a man for wounding me,
 a young man for striking me.
 If Cain is to be avenged seven times over,
 then for Lamech it will be seventy-seven times!

Walton labels this dirge as a “song of revenge,” contrasting the promise of seventy-fold recriminations with Jesus’s command to forgive seventy times seven (Matt. 18:22).³² Kidner observes this “taunt-song reveals the swift progress of sin. Where Cain succumbed to it, Lamech exults in it.”³³

Lamech employed the fruit of the creation mandate for perverse purposes, demonstrating that in a fallen world, innovation and ignominy often run on parallel tracks. “Cain’s family,” Kidner continues, “is a microcosm; its pattern of technical prowess and moral failure is that of humanity.”³⁴ In fact, this subduing of the earth, combined with a heart turned away from the Creator, climaxed over generations so exponentially that it required God’s judgment in the flood.

Does this imply that every invention by pagan human hands is to be rejected or ignored? No, but it does mean innovation, when applied for perverse purposes, works against the Creator’s design. Reinke asserts that “God gave music making, tool making, and cattle breeding to man, but not for man to use for whatever selfish purposes he has for wealth and power and opulence.”³⁵ Thus, we find God’s gracious fulfillment of the promise of Genesis 3:16 in the birth of Seth (Gen. 4:25), whose progeny would not eschew the cultural mandate that was the hallmark of his brother’s family, and from whom would be preserved a people who would not forget the Creator. In the time of Seth’s son Enosh, “people begin to call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen. 4:26).

In every generation, there is the temptation to believe that mere innovation is the answer to solving social ills and making humans turn away

³²Walton, *Genesis*, 100.

³³Kidner, *Genesis*, 85.

³⁴Kidner, *Genesis*, 83.

³⁵Reinke, *God, Technology, and the Christian Life*, 203.

from the cycle of violence and death. Yet this family of inventors recorded in Genesis 4 proves that technological progress alone is impotent to save what ails the human heart. Thus, Allan Ross and John Oswalt write, “So here is a picture of a community of people, fast developing into a society with all the conveniences necessary for the good life; but it is one in which people are changing the divine institutions and defying the laws of God, seeking power, pleasure, and self-indulgence.”³⁶

This commentary could be written about our modern age. The twentieth century witnessed enormous leaps in human inventions, from transportation via horseback to space flight, from letter-writing as a primary means of communication to the dawn of the internet. Yet the last century was a bloody one, with millions around the world dying as the result of more efficient ways to conduct war. With every new piece of technology—innovations we should welcome as good gifts from God—also comes new ways of rebelling against the Creator and enacting violence on fellow image-bearers. This reality should not turn us away from the cultural mandate. Cain’s family shows that God still uses sinful and rebellious humans to advance his purposes. Yet, we should be sobered by technology’s inability to change the human heart. Walton is right in observing from this text that “People cannot keep the law. Their only hope is to call out to God to save them.”³⁷

Through that other son of Eve—Seth—would come the Second Adam who would conquer sin, death, and the grave and would crush the serpent. The gospel, then, restores our creative efforts (Eph. 2:10) so that our creation and innovation will not glorify violence but will instead praise our Creator (Pss. 96:1, 100:1–5; Rev. 15:1–4).

CONCLUSION

It is fitting that the name Jubal—of obscure mention in an overlooked chapter in Genesis—is engraved on the edifice of Cowden Hall, for one can argue that without Jubal, the other thirty names might not take their place on this hallowed hall. Though fallen, he was used by God to fulfill a crucial aspect of the creation mandate.

Jubal’s life serves as both an inspiration and a somber warning. God’s people must continue the creative and innovative acts that began in Genesis 4. Redeemed sons of Adam can appreciate the music and cultural goods

³⁶John Oswalt and Alan Ross, *Genesis, Exodus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017), 63.

³⁷Walton, *Genesis*, 101.

produced by humans, even from hands that do not worship Christ. Christians can and should engage in our own acts of creation to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). Yet, we must also recognize that mere technology, without the witness of God's spirit, produces a clanging cymbal (1 Cor. 13:1). Jubal reminds us that true worship involves both creation and Creator and points toward the day when "at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow, on heaven and earth and under the earth and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord" (Phil. 2:10–11).