

CHAOS TO ORDER

CAIN AND ABEL

Cain, Abel, and the Continuing Fall

Genesis 4:1-26

Introduction

The lesson of Genesis Chapter 4 begins with the birth of Cain.

“Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” (Genesis 4:1 NKJV)

“Now Adam knew Eve, his wife.” This is the first specific mention of sex in the Bible. The term knew or “to know” means they had sexual relations, and the word is used often in the Bible in this sense (Genesis 4:17, 4:25, 38:26, Judges 11:39, 1 Samuel 1:19). This is a powerful way to describe the high interpersonal relationship in which the Bible views the union of a man and a woman. Most terms and phrases people use for sex today are either coarse or violent, but the Bible sees sex as a means of knowing one another in a deeply committed relationship. There is nothing impure or unclean in sex itself unless it’s misused.

Eve said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” The name Cain meant, “I’ve got him, or Here he is.” Eve probably thought that Cain was the seed that God promised, the deliverer who would come from Eve (Genesis 3:15). There is a sense in which Eve said, “I have *the* man from the LORD.”

Most parents want good things for their children and hope they are destined for greatness. Adam, and especially Eve, had these expectations for Cain. But it went farther than everyday parental hopes and expectations. Adam and Eve expected Cain to be the Messiah God promised. Eve thought she held in her arms the Messiah, the Savior of the whole world, yet she really held in her arms the first murderer.

Eve has the faith to believe that the baby she held would become a full-grown man and be the Messiah.

I. Making an Acceptable Offering

In verse 2, we have the birth of Abel and the offerings of Cain and Abel.

“Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” (Genesis 4:2-5 NKJV)

Abel was a shepherd, and Cain was a farmer. Agriculture and the domestication of animals were practiced among the earliest humans. Adam and his descendants did not spend tens of thousands of years living as hunter-gatherer cave dwellers.

One day Abel brought an offering of the firstborn of his flock, and Cain brought an offering of vegetation (the fruit of the ground). The LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. Many assume that an animal sacrifice was the difference between their offerings, but grain offerings were acceptable before God, according to Leviticus 2. However, a grain offering couldn't be offered as an atonement for sin.

One commentator writes, "The word for offering, *minchah*, is used in its broadest sense, covering any type of gift a person could bring... Neither of the two sacrifices is made specifically for sin. Nothing in the account points in this direction." (Leupold) The writer of the Hebrews gives us some indication why the offering of Abel was accepted and the offering of Cain was rejected. Hebrews 11:4 says, "By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks." (Hebrews 11:4 NKJV)

By faith, Abel offered up a more excellent sacrifice than Cain. Cain's offering was heartless (his heart just wasn't in it.), while Abel's offering was made in faith, in a desire to worship God. Abel brought his flock's firstborn and their fat, making it an extra special gift to God. The burning of fat in sacrifice before God is called a sweet aroma to the LORD in Leviticus 17. The offering of Cain was probably more aesthetically pleasing; Abel's would have been a bloody mess. But God was more interested in an offering made in faith from the heart than in artistic beauty.

Here, it was one lamb for one man. Later, at the Passover, it will be one lamb for each family. Then, on the Day of Atonement, it was one lamb for the whole nation. Finally, with Jesus, one Lamb took away the sin of the whole world.

We don't know how Cain and Abel knew their sacrifices were accepted or not accepted. Probably, there was some outward evidence that made it obvious. There are Biblical examples of acceptable sacrifices consumed by fire from God. (Judges 6:21; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chronicles 21:26; 2 Chronicles 7:1).

When his offering was rejected, Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. Cain's anger seems rooted in jealousy and pride. Cain couldn't bear that his brother's offering was accepted and his was not. The epidemic of sin quickly escalated.

Cain now committed the more sophisticated sins of spiritual pride and hypocrisy.

II. God Warns About Anger and Sin

In verse 6, God warns Cain.

“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 should rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6-7 NKJV)

God asks Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?” God deals with Cain in loving confrontation, not instant rebuke. God makes it clear that Cain would be accepted *if* he did well. Of course, God knew the answers to the questions He asked, but He wanted Cain to understand and resist the pull toward violence and anger within him.

God warned Cain about the destructive nature of sin. God said, “If you do not do well, sin lies at the door.” Cain could resist sin and discover God’s blessing or succumb to sin and become consumed by rebellion. We prevent sin from ruling over us by letting God be our master. Without God as our master, we will become slaves to sin.

In verse 8, we see that Cain does not listen to God’s warning and murders his brother Abel.

III. Cain Rejects God and Murders Abel.

“Now Cain talked with Abel, his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and killed him.” (Genesis 4:8 NKJV)

Cain planned to catch Abel by surprise, lulling him with pleasant conversation. Cain commits premeditated murder, ignoring God’s advice. No human had ever died or been killed before. But Cain probably knew how animals were killed for sacrifice and chose to take Abel’s life the same way.

Sin progressed quickly through the young human race. The hoped-for redeemer turned out to be a murderer, and the second son was the victim of murder. Humanity’s moral condition quickly degenerated. Once unleashed, sin could not be contained.

In verse 9, God confronts Cain.

“Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where *is* Abel your brother?” He said, “I do not know. *Am* I my brother’s keeper?” And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you *are* cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.” (Genesis 4:9-12 NKJV)

The LORD said to Cain, "Where *is* Abel, your brother?" He said, "I don't know. *Am* I my brother's keeper?" Cain's reply is famous. God knew the answer to this question, but He wanted Cain to confess his sin and start to do right.

How futile it was for Cain to lie! Did he think God didn't know where Abel was or that he could actually hide his sin from God? The truth is that Cain *was* supposed to be his brother's keeper, but instead, he became his brother's murderer and murdered him for the lowest of reasons.

Jude 11 warns us about the way of Cain, which is unbelief, empty religion that leads to jealousy, persecution of those who do good, and stirs up murderous anger. There is no greater curse on the earth than empty, vain religion.

In verse 10, God pronounces a curse upon Cain.

"And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you *are* cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." (Genesis 4:10-12 NKJV)

The blood of Abel spoke, and it spoke of judgment. The blood of Jesus also speaks, but of grace and sin having been judged (Hebrews 12:24). The curse upon Cain was that Adam's curse would be amplified in him.

In verse 13, Cain complains of the severity of God's judgment.

"And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment *is* greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen *that* anyone who finds me will kill me." And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him." (Genesis 4:13-15 NKJV)

Cain didn't feel bad about his sin, only about his punishment. Many people are just like Cain. They only feel bad about their punishment, not their sin. "One of the clearest marks of sin is our almost innate desire to excuse ourselves and complain if we are judged in any way." (Boice) "One of the consequences of sin is that it makes the sinner pity himself instead of causing him to turn to God. One of the first signs of new life is that the individual takes sides with God against himself." (Barnhouse)

As significant as God's judgment against Cain was, God did not want Cain killed by others. So God set an identifying and protective mark upon Cain. Despite all the speculation, no one really knows what this mark upon Cain was.

Conclusion

In verse 16, we have one of the saddest statements in the Bible.

“Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son—Enoch.”

(Genesis 4:16-17 NKJV)

Genesis 5:4 says Adam had other sons and daughters. Cain obviously married his sister. And at this point, the gene pool of humanity was pure enough to allow close marriage without the harm of inbreeding. Later, there came a time when God decreed no further marriages between close relatives. God did not prohibit such marriages until the time of Moses. Marrying a brother or sister was not forbidden until God forbade it.

Cain built a city, and we have the beginning of urbanization. Urbanization is a man-centered endeavor. Cain even named the city after his son, not after God. From here, the fall of the human race continued and even increased.

In verse 18, we find the generations following Cain.

“To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech. Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one *was* Adah, and the name of the second *was* Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother’s name *was* Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain *was* Naamah.” (Genesis 4:18-22 NKJV)

The picture is one of rapid advancement. Succeeding generations quickly progressed as home builders, in music and the arts, and metalworking. The idea that humanity actually advanced very quickly goes against most modern theories. The way of Cain always puts man’s ideas ahead of God’s. We see this when Methushael begot Lamech, which means conqueror. Lamech was the sixth from Adam on Cain’s side. Lamech’s arrogance stands in contrast to the godliness of Enoch, who was the sixth from Adam in Seth’s line (Jude 14). Lamech was the first bigamist in history, defying God’s plan for one man and one woman to become one flesh (Genesis 2:24, Matthew 19:4-8).

Verse 23 describes Lamech’s arrogant boast.

“Then Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; Wives of Lamech, listen to my speech! For I have killed a man for wounding me, Even a young man for hurting me. If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.” (Genesis 4:23-24 NKJV)

Lamech boasted about committing murder and believed he could meet out an even greater retribution than God. It shows the progressive degeneration of Cain's descendants.

Things quickly became worse with the human race. But just when you think all is lost, Seth is born to Adam and Eve.

Verse 25 says, "And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed." And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then *men* began to call on the name of the LORD." ([Genesis 4:25-26 NKJV](#))

There's always hope when you trust in the Lord! Seth would become a godly man, and his descendants would bring about the promise of a deliverer from the Seed of the Woman. Then people began to call on the name of the LORD. That is still true today. Romans 10:13 says, "For "WHOEVER CALLS ON THE NAME OF THE LORD SHALL BE SAVED." ([Romans 10:13 NKJV](#))

If you're overwhelmed by your life situations and the chaos all around you, call out to God today and ask Him to bring order to your chaos. Don't follow the path of Satan and Cain; choose the path of God and, like Seth, call upon the name of the Lord.