

Genesis Chapter 4

Genesis 4:1 "And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD."

"Knew Eve his wife": the act of sexual intercourse was considered the only means by which God Himself gave children. He was acknowledged as the sovereign giver of all life.

"Knew" in this context refers to sexual relations. It is also the connecting link to the whole chapter; note the appearance of the word in connection with the tree of knowledge (in verse 1, 17, and 25). The replacing of a son by "knowing" is antithetical to the murder, which is denied in verse 9 by, "I know not."

Some take "from the Lord" as an accusative: "I have gotten a man from the Lord." But the preposition is better, "I have created, acquired, a man with [the help of] Yahweh!" thus Eve sees her generative power as part of the sharing of divine power: "Yahweh formed man; I have formed the second man."

Genesis 4:2 "And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

"She again bare his brother": Some think the boys may have been twins, since no time element intervenes between verses 1 and 2.

"Keeper of sheep ... tiller of the ground": both occupations were respectable; in fact, most people subsisted through a combination of both. God's focus was not on their vocation, but on the nature of their respective offerings.

"Brother": This word appears seven times in this passage. The name "Abel" appears seven times and "Cain" 14 times, which heightens the contrast between the two men. "Abel" means "Keeper" and refers to his occupation as a keeper of sheep.

Tilling the ground and keeping the sheep were both honorable trades. It seems both sons worked.

Genesis 4:3 "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD."

"Fruit of the ground": Produce in general.

Verses 4-5: Abel's offering was acceptable (Heb. 11:4), not just because it was an animal, nor just because it was the very best of what he had, nor even that it was the culmination of a zealous heart for God; but, because it was in every way obediently given according to what God must have revealed (though not recorded in Genesis).

Cain, disdaining the divine instruction, just brought what he wanted to bring: some of his crop.

Genesis 4:4 "And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering:"

“Firstlings ... fat”: The best animals.

“Firstling of his flock” refers to the fact that Abel’s offering was accepted because it was a blood sacrifice based upon previous knowledge (3:21). Thus, he acknowledged that his sin deserved death and could be covered only by the death of a guiltless sacrifice (Heb. 9:22).

That his lamb was a “firstling” and “fat” may also imply that he gave the best that he had in contrast to Cain’s offering. However, it is obvious from the entire account that Abel’s offering was “more excellent” (Heb. 11:4) because it was the right kind of offering as well as being made with the right heart attitude.

God would require a firstling of the flock (lamb), sacrifice connected with forgiveness of sins. God required the blood of a lamb for sacrifice. Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.

Hebrews 9:22 "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission."

We do not fully understand why this is necessary, but we do understand that from the beginning this was so. God Himself killed an animal and made aprons for Adam and Eve (sacrificing for them). When the law was given, much detail was given about the necessity of a Lamb sacrifice. Cain's offering was earthly as it had no blood sacrifice.

Genesis 4:5 "But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wrath, and his countenance fell."

Rather than being repentant for his sinful disobedience, he was hostile toward God, whom he could not kill, and jealous of his brother, whom he could kill (1 John 3:12; Jude 11).

It is a very dangerous thing to get angry with God. God does not have to explain the reason for the things He does. We just have to comply with His wishes. He (Cain), was not just angry with God. He was jealous of his brother. His jealousy drove him to commit another more serious sin. It is dangerous to harbor jealousy. It generally leads to additional sin, even now.

Genesis 4:6 "And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen?"

God approached Cain in love and offered him a chance to correct his mistake. Again, God asked convicting questions. He made no accusations.

Genesis 4:7 "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee [shall be] his desire, and thou shalt rule over him."

God gave Cain the opportunity to do "well" that is, to make the right kind of sacrifice with the right heart attitude. He then warned Cain that an offering of good works would not be accepted.

God reminded Cain that if he had obeyed God and offered the animal sacrifices God had required, his sacrifices would have been acceptable. It wasn't personal preference on God's part, or disdain for Cain's vocation, or the quality of his produce that caused God to reject his sacrifice.

"Sin lieth at the door": God told Cain that if he chose not to obey His commands, ever-present sin, crouched and waiting to pounce like a lion, would fulfill its desire to overpower him (3:16).

God judges the heart. He saw that Cain's heart was full of sin, jealousy, and even murder. God would not require something that was impossible to do. Cain was trying to take a short cut.

He offered what was easy to acquire and would cost him very little. Cain brought an offering of his choice, rather than an offering that would please God. So many times, we choose to do what we want to do, and not what God has called us to do.

When we fall on our faces in failure, we want to blame anyone, or anything, except ourselves for our failure. God has a perfect plan. We are not happy until we fit into that plan.

God even mentions to Cain, that Cain was the firstborn and would actually rule over his brother, if Cain would straighten up and do what was right. God reminded him that, even then, he was plotting in his heart a terrible sin.

Genesis 4:8 "And 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 slew him."

The first murder in Scripture (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:51; Heb. 12:24). Cain rejected the wisdom spoken to him by God Himself, rejected doing well, refused to repent, and thus crouching sin pounced and turned him into a killer. (1 John 3:10-12).

"Cain's anger had already been noted in verses 5 and 6. Now, in a fit of anger, he murders Abel. Thus, begins the long history of human violence and man's inhumanity to his fellowman. This murder also had to be a heartbreaking reminder to Adam and Eve that the consequence of sin is death (2:17; Rom. 6:23).

Cain's jealousy had now come to produce a terrible sin. When they were alone (no arbitrator), Cain killed Abel. This terrible sin is prominent in families even today. Statistics tell us that 25% of the murders or 1 out of 4 murders are committed by members of the family, in fact the immediate family.

Brothers are very seldom alike and jealousy springs up many times when parents show a special love for one over the other. There is never a reason to murder. Killing in war, or to defend yourself, is not murder. Jesus said that when you hate your brother that you have committed murder already in your heart.

Genesis 4:9 "And the LORD said unto Cain, Where [is] Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: [Am] I my brother's keeper?"

Cain's insolence and arrogance are evident in his curt response to God's question, "Where is Abel thy brother?" First he lied and then used a play on words to avoid answering the question. "Am I my brother's keeper"; plays on the name Abel, "Keeper."

Cain's sarcasm was a play on words, based on the fact that Abel was the "keeper" of sheep. Lying was the third sin resulting from Cain's attitude of indifference to God's commands. Sin was ruling over him (verse 7).

Cain's answer to God was an angry response. Cain probably thought, if he could get rid of this brother, it would put him in better standing with God (No competition).

How many times today do we hear this cry, "Am I my brother's keeper?" In God's sight, yes, we are our brother's keeper. If we see a brother in need and turn our backs, God will count it against us. The same in reverse is true. If we help others, we will be blessed of God for it. "In as much as ye have done it to the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me." (Part of Matt. 25-40)

In Matthew 10, we read in Jesus' own words.

Matthew 10:42 "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

Yes, we are our brother's and sister's keepers. Some people have the wrong impression about wealthy people. Most of them that I know are very generous people, willing to help when they see a need. It is not their wealth that sends them to hell. It is the worship of their money.

I love the Scripture in 1st Timothy 6:17-19, that explains how a person with wealth should handle what God has entrusted to them.

1 Timothy 6:17-19 "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;" "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;" "Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."

You see, there is not anything wrong with having money. The sin occurs when we put that money ahead of the things of God through greed.

The U.S., as a whole, has one really good thing going for it. It is a charitable nation. We help the suffering of the world. In 1 Peter, it tells it all:

1 Peter 4:8 "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

Genesis 4:10 "And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground."

“Voice ... blood”: A figure of speech to indicate that Abel’s death was well known to God.

“Thy brother’s blood” is plural in Hebrew and may refer to his “seeds” who have been cut off and will never be born. Thus, God’s judgment is on those who, by whatever means, abort human life. “Crieth” means crying out for vengeance.

This is the first murder in the Bible. Not only had Adam and Eve lost Abel in physical death, but they had lost Cain (he was a murderer).

This is a strange statement that God made here. (Abel's blood cried out to God from the ground).

Our lives are dependent wholly on the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Then life, in this sense, is in the throne of God to purchase our salvation for us. Without the shedding of blood there is no life, as we already mentioned from Hebrews 9:22.

Genesis 4:11 "And now [art] thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;"

“Cursed from the earth”: A second curse came from God affecting just the productivity of the soil Cain would till. To a farmer like Cain, this curse was severe, and meant that Cain would all his life be a wanderer, “a vagrant and a wanderer” (verses 12, 14).

Cain was now to be “cursed” (the serpent and the ground, 3:24, 17). This was a special curse making it impossible for Cain to be a farmer, his occupation in verse 2.

Genesis 4:12 "When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

He would be a “fugitive” (the root meaning to “wander” or “move”), and “vagabond” (denoting a “going back and forth”), conveying the idea of wandering aimlessly. He dwells in the land of Nod (“Wandering”), a word with the same root as vagabond in Hebrew.

There is a little bit of difference in the curse here for Cain, and the one for Adam. Adam, himself, was not cursed, just the earth. But in this instance of Cain, God had spoken the curse on Cain, as well as the ground. This made it doubly hard for the earth to produce for Cain. Cain would move from place to place looking for a more productive field to plant on, but he would not find one.

His crops would fail wherever he was. The blessings of God had been revoked and now there was a curse instead. Man's sin is the greatest curse of life. It makes him a wanderer (running from sin), and there is no place to hide. (In verse 13), we hear Cain cry out for mercy.

Genesis 4:13 And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment [is] greater than I can bear.

He has just killed his brother and now blames God for being too harsh!

“Punishment” may refer to either (1) the actual punishment for sin; or (2) his “iniquity” or “guilt”. It reflects his feeling that either the punishment, or his burden of guilt which he now recognized, was too harsh.

Genesis 4:14 "Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, [that] every one that findeth me shall slay me."

“Every one ... slay me”: This shows that the population of the earth was, by then, greatly increased. As a wanderer and scavenger in an agricultural world, Cain would be easy prey for those who wanted his life.

Adam hid from Yahweh in shame and guilt (3:8); now Cain must hide himself.

“From thy face shall I be hid” is a passive verb form (“I must hide myself from your face”), and is part of his curse.

“Every one” is “anyone finding me”; it looks to the idea of blood revenge for this death and anticipates other murders.

Anthropomorphisms: Occasionally the Scriptures use expressions that seem to attribute human, physical features to God (such as fingers, hands, arms, and face). Theologians refer to these as “anthropomorphisms.”

Because God is spirit and not a body (John 4:24), we know these expressions do not describe Him physically but are used to help man understand truths concerning God.

Paul used a similar type of expression when he urged Christians to “run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1). He did not mean Christians should devote time to jogging as they would to prayer and bible study. He used this figure of speech to reemphasize the truth of continuing to live the Christian life. (Gen. 3:8; Gen. 4:14; 1 John 1:5).

No one wants to face his punishment. Everyone looks for a scapegoat, or a way out. Self-pity had entered Cain. No where do we see remorse for what he had done. Instead of improving his position with God, he had caused a terrible rift. His fears of having someone do the same thing to him were overwhelming.

He knew he would be looking out over his shoulder constantly. Never would he be able to find a place of peace and rest. It is as if he blamed God for what had happened to him, instead of realizing his sin and repenting.

Genesis 4:15 "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."

“The Lord set a mark” While not described here, it involved some sort of identifiable mark that he was under divine protection which was mercifully given to Cain by God. At the same time, the mark that saved him was the lifelong sign of his shame.

“Mark”: As another act of His grace and goodness toward Cain. It is best to take it as a personal sign for Cain, like that for Gideon in Judges 6:36-40 and Elisha in 2 Kings 2:9-12. The idea of “vengeance” appears in verse 24 with the taunt song of Lamech.

We see the awful cost of vengeance (7 fold). "Vengeance is mine saith the Lord."

Genesis Chapter 4 Questions

1. What was the name of Eve's first son?
2. What was her second son's name?
3. What were their occupations?
4. What did Cain bring as an offering to God?
5. What did Abel bring as an offering to God?
6. What caused God to accept Abel's sacrifice and reject Cain's?
7. Without the shedding of blood there is no what?
8. When Cain realized that God did not accept his offering, what did Cain do?
9. What drove Cain to commit a more serious crime?
10. In verse 7 God said, "if thou doest not well, _____ lieth at the door?"
11. Where did Cain attack Abel?
12. What did Cain do to Abel?
13. What percent of murders are committed by close family members today?

14. When God asked Cain where Abel was, what two replies did Cain make?
15. In Matthew 10:42, what small item does God say He would reward if it is given in the name of a prophet?
16. What wrong impression do we have about rich people?
17. In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, what should we be quick to do if God has blessed us with money?
18. What one really good thing does the U.S. have going for it?
19. What does 1st Peter 4:8, tell us that charity will do?
20. What cried to God from the ground?
21. What purchased our salvation?
22. What three judgments did God speak to Cain?
23. What was the difference in the curse for Adam and Cain's curse?
24. What is the greatest curse in life?
25. What was the mark that was placed on Cain?