

CAIN AND ABEL (1)

A Meditation on Genesis 4:1-16

Like most new parents, Adam and Eve were overjoyed by the arrival of their firstborn child, Cain. Their excitement was heightened exponentially by the expectation that he would be the promised Messiah; the deliverer who would crush the serpent's head and restore paradise. Tragically, this would-be Messiah turned out to be a monster... a murderer.

In Genesis 3:15, the LORD said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring." This is the beginning of the animosity between the two lines—the righteous and the unrighteous, the children of God and the children of the devil. And it didn't take long for this enmity to blossom. It starts right here with Cain and Abel. Jesus refers to Abel as righteous and innocent, while Hebrews 11 mentions his faith. On the other hand, 1 John 3:12 says Cain was "of the evil one."

"In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was angry, and his face fell" (Gen. 4:3-5). The specific requirements for offerings will be spelled out with painstaking detail a little later in the Pentateuch, but obviously some preliminary instructions were given to Cain and Abel. How else would they have known about the need to even offer sacrifices to God?

Hebrews 11:4 gives us this added insight, "By faith Abel offer-ed to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks." This may be an anachronistic interpretation, so I'm not dogmatic, but technically speaking Abel offered a sacrifice, while Cain didn't. I say this, because grain offerings, in Leviticus, are acceptable and pleasing to God, but not as a sin offering. A sin offering required the shedding of blood, since it looked forward to the ultimate sin offering, which was the shed blood of Jesus Christ. So perhaps Cain's offering was rejected for its lack of blood, or maybe it was rejected simply because it wasn't accompanied by faith, which Hebrews makes clear.

"The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard." This is a reminder that not all sacrifices are acceptable to God. "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD" (Pro. 15:8). Our ungodly culture, including many in the church unfortunately, thinks it can offer God its lame leftovers, and somehow He is obligated to accept these "offerings." Well, He is *not* obligated, and He is anything but pleased by these offerings. "When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Pre-sent that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 1:8). God says, "Bring the full tithes into the storehouse" (3:10). "Put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need" (vs. 10). When we offer God anything less than what He requires of us we rob Him, as well as ourselves.

When Cain's offering was rejected, how did he respond? With broken-hearted sorrow? With tearful repentance? With another offering? No, incredibly, he responds with anger. "The LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it'" (Gen. 4:6-7). James M. Boice comments, "Here there is a point in the story that always touches me deeply. Although the offering of Cain was rejected, God did not simply walk away from Cain, as it were, but rather approached him and tried to reason with him about his sacrifice and what he needed to do to be accepted. So also would God plead with you, if you are fighting him" (James M. Boice, *Genesis*, p. 252).

God warned Cain to get ready for the temptation that was seeking to devour him. Sin was said to be "crouching" at the door, as if it were a tiger or lion or dragon just waiting for an opportunity to pounce. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus knew the disciples would be facing great opposition, so He exhorted them, "Watch and pray that you do not fall into temptation." As we know they didn't, they fell asleep, and as a result they did fall. And we should pray daily as our Lord taught us: And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

By Wayne Christensen/Fox Lake Community Church/ See "Permissions" for reproduction authorization

CAIN AND ABEL (2)

A Meditation on Genesis 4:1-16

The Lord warns Cain about the temptation that is ready to consume him. If he fails to resist the temptation it will destroy his relationship with God. Tragically, it seems as if Cain just ignores God's warning. Perhaps he thought God was exaggerating when He spoke about Cain's vulnerability to sin, or perhaps he just didn't care. It could be that he couldn't or didn't want to let go of his anger.

In any case, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him" (vs. 8). God rejects Cain's offering; He graciously warns him not to be mastered by sin, and Cain's response is to kill his innocent brother. Does this make sense? Since Cain is unable to lash out against God, he lashes out against Abel, and stabs him to death, probably with a knife. Many commentators have correctly noted that we must recognize that God's people are often the target of man's hatred for God.

First John 3:12-13 sheds additional light on the reason for the first murder and the first martyr: "We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be surprised brothers, that the world hates you." Cain killed Abel for simply being a righteous man. Proverbs 29:27 gives us the same principle, but shows how it is two-sided: "An unjust man is an abomination to the righteous, but the one whose way is straight is an abomination to the wicked." It seems that Abel didn't preach at his brother—at least not verbally, though his life preached loudly and with great conviction. Nor did Abel behave in a self-righteous manner that would have justifiably irritated and annoyed his brother. All Abel did was try to humbly live a life pleasing to God. But that was too much for Cain, so he killed his brother.

This mutual abominating that takes place between that righteous and the unrighteous is important to understand, because every Christian will experience conflict and hostility from family members or co-workers or neighbors that doesn't make sense. In fact, it will seem down-right insane...until you realize that you're greatly offensive to some people by just going to church every Sunday and trying to live a quiet, God-glorifying life.

"Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?'" (Gen. 4:9). What a hard heart! Here we have the first recorded *human* lie, which isn't surprising, because one sin often leads to another sin, especially lying in order to cover-up the original sin. And if lying wasn't bad enough, Cain basically disowns his own flesh and blood brother. Cain doesn't even show a hint of remorse for what he has done. "We should love one another. We should not be like Cain" (1 Jn. 3:11b-12a).

"And the LORD said, 'What is this you have done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground'" (Gen. 4:10). Abel's blood is personified, and it's crying out for vengeance. And God will certainly see that he gets it. The Bible is replete with the teaching that God will avenge the blood of His people—even a seven-fold vengeance is seen (Ps. 79:10-12; cf. Rev. 6:9-11).

The LORD then curses Cain: "And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Gen. 4:11-12). Cain finds himself doubly cursed. The ground was already cursed once due to Adam's sin, but now it is cursed again so that it will be even more uncooperative. The result is that Cain will be a fugitive looking for a place to settle, so he can work the ground.

"Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold you have driven me today way from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me shall kill me'" (vv. 13-14). Cain whines about his punishment; another indicator that he is still unrepentant. God could have struck him down; he should be thankful he's still alive.

In the midst of this entire episode God is still merciful to Cain. "Then the LORD said to him, 'Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold' And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him" (vs. 15). God could have said, "Too bad! You made your bed, now lie in it."

"Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden" (vs. 16). What a sad ending! We see that sin always leads away from the presence of the LORD.

By Wayne Christensen/Fox Lake Community Church/ See "Permissions" for reproduction authorization

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 1,000 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Fox Lake Community Church.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy:

By Wayne Christensen/Fox Lake Community Church.

Website: www.foxlakechurch.org Email: wchristensen@foxlakechurch.org

847-587-1331