

ORIGINS

"THE BEGINNING OF SACRIFICE"

GENESIS 4:1-26

This Week's Core Competency

Humanity – I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior. John 3:16, *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

The passage selected for this study tells the story of the brothers, Cain and Abel. Ironically it records the first birth and the first death—a murder—in human history. In line with what God had said, Eve became pregnant and gave birth to Cain and sometime later his brother Abel. When the two boys grew up, the older one worked the soil and the younger one kept flocks. Lest the reader mistakenly think that the fall had implications for Adam and Eve only, God makes it clear that sin, once it was unleashed in the world by them, affected their children as well. Their children inherited their parents' nature. One writer puts it this way: "The subject matter of Genesis 4 is the spread of sin from the *family* to the *society*. In the first part of the chapter, the story of Cain and Abel, the narrative relates how the destruction of the original creation involved not only husband and wife but brother and brother. Here was a man (Cain) in rebellion against his brother and against God; he did not submit to God and care for his brother but destroyed his brother and denied

Cain's identity, which was marred by violence, engenders his progeny's identity, which is marked by violence.

— Bruce K. Waltke

responsibility for it. In every aspect, then, the rebellion described in this story was a decline from the paradise story" (Allen Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 152 italics added).

If the idea of the story pertains to the spread of sin in the world, then the message of the passage pertains primarily to what we believe about humanity. All people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior. This fits nicely in the context of Genesis 1-11, which documents the unrelenting spread of sin from generation to generation and prepares the way for God to announce to Abram "all peoples of the earth will be blessed through you" (Ge 12:3). Nevertheless, the passage has something to say about worship as well, for it was the fact that God looked with favor on Abel and his offering but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor that precipitated Cain's sinful act. So the narrative pertains secondarily to the practice of worship.

In a scene from John Steinbeck's novel *East of Eden*, banter around a kitchen table turns to the story of Cain and Abel, when a pigtailed Chinese cook says, "No story has power nor will it last, unless we feel in ourselves that it is true and true for us." Since few of us have murdered a brother after attending a disheartening church service, the question we must ask ourselves is, "Where do I see myself in this story?" I suppose most of us identify with innocent Abel, the victim of a brother's jealous rage, but at the same time I suspect that the Holy Spirit intends us to identify with Cain, a person affected by sin that sin desired for its evil purposes. The Apostle John warns us, "Do not be

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like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous" (1Jn 3:12). Cain believed God did not do right by him and took it out on his brother. We must not follow in his steps. One commentator wisely writes, "True Christians recognize their propensity to be irresponsible and their hate toward brothers and sisters, but, unlike Cain, they repent because they know God does what is right" (Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis*, 105).

day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

Genesis 4:1-26

1 Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." 2 Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. 3 In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. 4 But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, 5 but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

6 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? 7 If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."

8 Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?"

"I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

10 The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. 11 Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth."

13 Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear. 14 Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless

wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me."

15 But the LORD said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the LORD put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. 16 So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

17 Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. 18 To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech.

19 Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. 20 Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. 21 His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. 22 Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah.

23 Lamech said to his wives,

"Adah and Zillah, listen to me;
wives of Lamech, hear my words.
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for injuring me.
24 If Cain is avenged seven times,
then Lamech seventy-seven times."

25 Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." 26 Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh.

At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD.

EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- * Identify the major characters in this passage by underlining each of their names.
- * Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 4, 5.
- * Circle "you/your" in vv. 6, 7.
- * Bracket "sin is crouching at your door" in v. 7.

- * In the margin next to v. 8 write, "Cf., v. 23."
- * Highlight vv. 9, 10.
- * Circle "restless wanderer" in vv. 12, 14.
- * In the margin next to v. 12 write, "Cf., v. 17."
- * Circle "the land" in v. 14.

- * Underline "your presence" in v. 14 and "the LORD's presence" in v. 16.
- * In the margin next to v. 15 write, "Cf., v. 24."
- * Circle "mark" in v. 15.

- * Underline "Lamech married two women" in v. 19.
- * Highlight v. 23.
- * Circle "Seth" in v. 25.
- * Bracket "call on the name of the LORD" in v. 26.

day **2** **EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. Divide Genesis 4:1-26 into two parts and label each one to reflect its contents.
2. Explain the two *contrasts* in verses 3-5.
3. What clues does the text give as to *why* God "did not look with favor" on Cain's offering?
4. God invites Cain to "do what is right" (v. 7). What might that be?
5. The LORD questioned Cain regarding Abel (v. 9). What do you infer about Cain from his answer?
6. Explain the *irony* of Cain's punishment (v. 11).
7. Summarize Cain's punishment (see v. 14) and characterize his response to it (see v. 13).
8. *What* do you infer about Cain's descendants from Lamech and his sons and *why*?
9. *Who* specifically began to do *what* specifically according to verse 26b?
10. **Discussion:** The second part of chapter 4 tells "the rest of the story" begun in the first part. How?

day 3

EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

Genesis 4:1-26 tells the story of Cain and his posterity. One commentator summarizes the story nicely as follows: "The subject matter of Genesis 4 is the spread of sin from the family to the society. In the first part of the chapter, the story of Cain and Abel, the narrative relates how the destruction of the original creation involved not only husband and wife but brother and brother. Here was a man in rebellion against his brother and against God; he did not submit to God and care for his brother but destroyed his brother and denied responsibility for it. In every aspect, then, the rebellion described in this story was a decline from the paradise story. Yet, God protected the life of the rebellious brother, so that he could live on in the world, albeit separated from the blessing. This theme is developed more fully in the second half of the chapter. There the story shows how individuals in primeval history became historical generations. Civilizations of godless people flourished under common grace-but the record makes it clear that their origins were in Cain" (Ross, 152).

The story of Cain and Abel is told in verses 1-16. It opens on a positive note, following Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden, with the birth of Cain, about whom Eve says in effect, "God made man, and now with the help of the LORD, I have made the second man" (156). Later, she gives birth to his brother Abel (v. 2). And it soon becomes evident that her two sons are the progenitors of two different "offspring" (3:15) seen in Cain's descendants (4:7-24) and those of Seth (5:3-32), the son God granted Eve "in place of Abel, since Cain killed him" (4:25).

As the story unfolds, the two brothers bring offerings to the LORD, and he looks with favor on Abel and his offering and does not look with favor on Cain and his. The narrator does not tell us why. However, it appears that Abel goes out of his way to please God by bringing him the *choicest portions* of the *firstborn* of his flock (v. 4), while Cain simply discharges his duty by bringing him *some of the fruits* of the soil (v. 3). The elder brother's body language tells it all; convinced the LORD has done him wrong, he is enraged.

The LORD then interrogates Cain, much like he had his father (3:9). He warns him to do what is right. Apparently if Cain owns up to the murder of his brother, he will be accepted and forgiven. But if he does wrong by refusing, sin, like a wild animal or evil demon, is waiting to seize its prey. He must either master it or it will master him. His tragic decision is

described in few words: "Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him" (v. 8). Derek Kidner, who has a way with words, writes: "Many details emphasize the depth of Cain's crime, and therefore of the fall: the context is worship, the victim a brother; and while Eve had been talked into her sin, Cain will not have even God talk him out of it; nor will he confess to it, nor yet accept his punishment" (*Genesis*, TOTC, 79).

Again the LORD interrogates Cain, this time much like he had his mother (3:13), not to invite his confession but to announce his punishment. One writer observes, "When Adam was challenged, he at least told the truth if not the whole truth (3:10), but Cain tells a bare-faced lie, 'I do not know,' and follows up with an impertinent witticism, 'Am I my brother's keeper'" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, *Genesis 1-15*, 106). God's punishment is ironically appropriate. "Cain had tilled the land. He had offered the fruit of the land, and given the land his brother's blood to drink; but from the land the blood cries against him, for which the land refuses him its fruit, so he is banned from the land" (Gunkel, 45)" (Wenham, 107). Being driven from the land entails being driven from God's presence, as well as the presence of family. Rather than accept his just punishment, he protests that it is excessive and intolerable. "My punishment is more than I can bear," he laments, protesting that it amounts to nothing less than a death sentence. "Not so," says the LORD, who then marks him with what might be called a "protective tattoo," which allows Cain to live out his life.

The story of Cain's progeny, which includes the development of civilization accompanied by humanity's moral decline, is told in verses 17-24. His lineage, which extends seven generations from Adam to Lamech, the last entry having three sons (v. 20), parallels the lineage of Seth, which extends ten generations from Adam to Noah, the last entry also having three sons (5:32). What is telling, however, is the fact that the seventh from Adam *through Seth* is Enoch, who walks with God and does not die (5:24), in contrast to the seventh from Adam *through Cain*, Lamech, who boasts of killing a young man and announces seventy-seven fold retribution on any who dare to take his life. Advances in civilization, e.g., animal husbandry, music, metal working, and literature (see Walton, 276-77), are accompanied by a decline in morality, e.g., bigamy, violence, and a disdain for life. In the words of one commentator,

Cain's "lineage is symbolic of human culture with great civilizations and no living God. The ambiguity of godless human culture is portrayed by paralleling advances in civilization with an increase in violence" (Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 271).

After describing the transmission of sin from the first parents, to the first family, to the first civilization, the chapter ends remarkably on a positive note. In a final flashback, the narrator tells us that God gave Eve a son "in place of Abel" (v. 25)

for whom she credited God alone (v. 25; cf., v. 1). Seth in turn became the progenitor of a line of godly descendants in contrast to the descendants of Cain. That godly remnant faithfully proclaimed the name of the LORD. "The text does not say that all the Sethites were righteous and all the Cainites were wicked . . . But it can be said that instances of faith were more likely to be found in the family that led to Abram . . . Some who traced their lineage to Seth, God's replacement for Abel, began to proclaim their faith" (Ross, 169)

The Message of the Passage

Sin, unleashed in the world by humanity's parents, now lurks around every corner of mankind's crooked culture in which the faithful must promote the knowledge of the LORD.

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22. Reflect on 3 "living questions" to apply what you have learned this week.

• **Journal your answers to the following *living* questions:**

–How is God making himself known to you?

–How does God want to change you?

–How is God calling you to change your world?

notes **N** STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

- v. 1 **Cain** In Hebrew the child's name sounds like the verb translated "have brought forth." This figure of speech called paronomasia connects Cain with Eve's sentiment expressed in the verb. "The main interpretive question is whether Eve sees herself as taking part in the creation process ('I have created along with Yahweh') or as having relied on Yahweh to get through the process ('I have obtained with the help/consent of Yahweh')" (see John H. Walton, *NIV Application Commentary: Genesis*, 261, who favors the latter; cf., Waltke, *Genesis*, 90, who is inclined to the former; cf., Wenham, 102).
- v. 3 **offering** The Hebrew word is a general term referring to a "present" or a "gift" and is used to refer to the grain offering described in Lev. 2, which suggests Cain's offering was not rejected because it was bloodless (Walton, 263). At least five different reasons have been given to explain why it was rejected (see Wenham, 104). In the opinion of one commentator Cain's sin was "tokenism" (Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 270). Cain brings 'some of the fruits.' There is no indication these are the first or the best. Abel brings the best, fat from 'the firstborn' (Waltke, *Genesis*, 97).
- v. 4 **fat portions** Lit. Abel brought "from the firstlings of his flocks and from their fat." The use of two modifiers connected by "and" like here is a figure of speech called a *hendiadys*. The idea expressed is that he brought "the fattest of the firstlings of his flock." Later the law required that worshipers give the best that they had to God, which included the firstborn of the flock that was the fattest or healthiest (Ex 13:2, 12; Lev 22:17-25).
- v. 4 **looked with favor** In both Abel's case and Cain's case the offerer is mentioned *before* his offering. This suggests that the *kind* of offering may not have been as important to God as the *heart* of the person making the offering. It seems Abel went out of his way to please God, but Cain was indifferent. He simply discharged a religious duty (U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: From Adam to Noah*, 205).
- v. 7 **sin** Sin, which entered the world through one man (3:6; cf. Rom 5:12) and is here mentioned by name for the first time, infected Cain and marked humanity's need for salvation.
- v. 7 **crouching** Sin, like a wild animal, was waiting to pounce on Cain. A similar word in Akkadian refers to a type of demon, in which case sin would be like a demon at the door (see Walton, 264).
- v. 8 **"Let's go . . ."** Cain's words to his brother, not found in the Hebrew text, are found in certain ancient versions (e.g., Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate). What Cain said is omitted from the KJV (margin NKJV) and NASB but included in most modern versions (NIV, NRSV, TEV).
- v. 7 **desires** The term refers to an urge to control or to dominate—here clearly for the sake of evil. God warned Cain that he had to resist evil and do right.
- v. 10 **blood cries, ground opened its mouth** Examples of *personification*. Blood does not literally cry out, neither does the ground have a literal mouth. The figures of speech add impact to the expressions.
- v. 11 **curse** "The curse in Genesis involved separation or alienation from the place of blessing, or even from those who were blessed" (Ross, 66). The ground would no longer yield its produce for Cain as it had up to that time (cf. 4:2, 3), and once the ground rebuffed his efforts, Cain was forced to wander from place to place.
- v. 12 **restless wanderer** Lit., "a wanderer and a fugitive." Another example of the figure called *hendiadys*, which here carries the meaning "ceaseless wanderer" (cf. note of v. 4). "In the garden there was lush provision of food; outside the garden there was arable land with cultivation being possible; Cain is driven to a place that has no hope of agriculture, so that one must survive by hunting and gathering" (Walton, 265). "'To be driven away from the land' (cf. v. 14) is to have all relationships, particularly with the family, broken. Moreover, it is to have one's relationships with the LORD broken (Coats, 65)" (Wenham, 108).
- v. 13 **punishment** Lit., "sin" or "iniquity" by *metonymy* refers to the punishment for his sin. "Cain responds with self-pity instead of repentance. He fears physical and social exposure but not the invisible God who has made him" (Waltke, *Genesis*, 98). He considers his punishment excessive and intolerable (Wenham, 108).
- v. 20 **raise livestock** "This family line is a tragic image of sin's distortion and destruction. The arts and sciences, appropriate extensions of the divine cultural mandate, are here expressed in a depraved culture as means of self-assertion and violence, which climaxes with Lamech's song of tyranny" (Waltke, *Genesis*, 100).
- v. 24 **seventy-seven times** Lamech turns justice into vengeance. "Sevenfold signifies in perfect measure (see above, on v. 15); seventy-sevenfold signifies in overflowing measure, more than is due, many for one" (Cassuto, 243).
- v. 26 **call** The expression "call on the name of the LORD" clearly suggests prayer, worship, and sacrifice, but according to one commentator, "the Pentateuch supports the idea of proclamation more than praying (cf. Gen. 12:8; Exod. 34:6; Lev. 1:1)" (Ross, 169).

Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

"Your children are so well behaved and get along so well!" The comment came from a mom at the park one spring afternoon. Rather than describe the battle scars I had from a sibling conflict that erupted at the dinner table the night before, I humbly thanked her and then quickly gathered my kids and headed to the car. I wanted to bask in that compliment for just a little while before the next round of fighting broke out. Sometimes brothers and sisters just don't get along. In our text this week we will look at the ultimate in sibling rivalry. Like Cain and Abel's conflict, most episodes of sibling rivalry begin in the heart. Here are some tips to help keep the peace in your home. (1) Teach and model respect for all people. Each person is a unique creation of God and deserves respect. (2) Be careful to not play favorites or compare children to one another. (3) Teach healthy conflict management. Help kids identify the reason they feel a certain way and then options for resolving the conflict rather than blaming or becoming angry. (4) Teach kids to think before they speak or react. Ask, Am I making a wise choice? (5) Celebrate peaceful resolutions and good behavior often. May your home be a place where the peace of God reigns!

What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Genesis 4

1. Why was Cain angry?
2. What did God tell him he must do about his anger?
3. Did Cain master his sin?

What Do You Think

1. Why do you think the Lord looked favorably upon Abel's sacrifice and not Cain's?
2. In what way did God show Cain mercy after He punished him?

What R U Going To Do

Surprise your brother or sister this week by doing something kind. Clean up your sister's toys. Take out the trash for your brother. Make them a card. If you're an only child, do something kind for your parents. Have fun making someone's day special!

MEMORY TIME

Core Comp

Humanity - I believe God loves everyone and we all need Jesus as our Savior.

Memory Verse

Psalm 100:4 - Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name.

KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized CC ____ and Verse _____. Family completed **Say** _____ **Think** _____ **Do** _____

Child's name _____ Grade ____ Parent's signature _____

Earn tokens by completing the Bible study portion of this page.
Questions: Kids@pantego.org

30 CORE COMPETENCIES

10 CORE BELIEFS

Trinity 2 Corinthians 13:14

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Salvation By Grace Ephesians 2:8-9

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

Authority of the Bible 2 Timothy 3:16-17

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Personal God Psalm 121:1-2

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Identity in Christ John 1:12

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Church Ephesians 4:15-16

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Humanity John 3:16

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Compassion Psalm 82:3-4

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

Eternity John 14:1-4

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

Stewardship 1 Timothy 6:17-19

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

10 CORE PRACTICES

Worship Psalm 95:1-7

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

Prayer Psalm 66:16-20

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Bible Study Hebrews 4:12

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-mindedness Matthew 6:33

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts Romans 12:4-6

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Biblical Community Acts 2:44-47

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Giving Away My Time Colossians 3:17

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Money

2 Corinthians 8:7

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Faith Ephesians

6:19-20

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

Giving Away My Life Romans 12:1

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

10 CORE VIRTUES

Joy John 15:11

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace Philippians 4:6-7

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

Faithfulness Proverbs 3:3-4

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Self-Control Titus 2:11-13

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Humility Philippians 2:3, 4

I choose to esteem others above myself.

Love 1 John 4:10-12

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Patience Proverbs 14:29

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness 1 Thess. 5:15

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

Gentleness Philippians 4:5

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Hope Hebrews 6:19-20

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

About the Authors

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Wendy Hollabaugh (B.S.W. University of Texas at Arlington) is the Children's Minister at Pantego Bible Church. Wendy has over ten years of experience in Children's Ministry. She has a passion for leading families to connect with God and each other. She enjoys creating compelling environments where kids fall in love with God and His Truth. Wendy and her husband, Greg, are also involved in their own personal youth ministry as they are training their three teenagers, Hannah, Aaron and Noah.



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