

The Book Of Genesis – Chapter Four

“Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have acquired a man from the Lord.' Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground” (Genesis 4:1-2).

Most people are probably familiar with the account of Cain and Abel from the Bible. But there's a lot more to their story than Cain's famous question, "***Am I my brother's keeper?***" in Genesis 4:9.

Genesis 4:1 tells us that Cain (or “*possession*”) ⁽¹⁾ was the very first human being ever born. While “*possession*” may seem to be an unconventional name for a child, that choice acknowledged Cain’s arrival as a divine gift or possession.

Eve later had another son named Abel. His name means “*breath, vapor, [or] vanity*” ⁽²⁾ This name suggests Adam and Eve had come to terms with the enduring consequences of their transgression in the Garden of Eden by the time Abel entered the world.

The following verse tells us that Cain and Abel went on to pursue two very different occupations. Abel became a rancher and managed the family's livestock. But while these men were moving in different employment directions, they were also moving in different spiritual directions as well...

“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 4:3-5).

So Cain and Abel each brought their offerings to God. Cain brought some of his farm produce as a gift and Abel made an offering to God from among his animals. But while God approved of Abel's gift, He did not have respect for Cain's offering. The question is, *why?*

(1) H7014 qayin Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h7014/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

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We may be able to find one possible answer to that question by looking at the description of each offering. Notice that Genesis 4:3 says, “***Cain brought an offering...***” but the following verse tells us “***Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat.***”

The fat portion was considered to be the very best part of the animal- that was the portion Abel presented to God. We're also told that Abel's gift came from among the firstborn of his flock. So in looking at this offering, we can say that Abel took his first and best and gave it to God. In other words, Abel made certain to offer God something that was worthy of Him.

Cain's offering was different. Unlike Abel, Cain did not necessarily give his first and best to God- we're simply told that he brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering. There's nothing really special about that- and there's a sizable difference between giving “some” to God (like Cain did) and bringing our first and best to Him (like Abel did).

These gifts also tell us something about Cain and Abel's spiritual lives as well. For example, the New Testament book of Hebrews talks about Abel's internal attitude toward God...

“It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. Abel’s offering gave evidence that he was a righteous man, and God showed his approval of his gifts. Although Abel

is long dead, he still speaks to us by his example of faith” (Hebrews 11:4 NIV).

Abel was faithful in offering his first and best to God, and God looked upon Him with favor or respect. In fact, there may be no higher compliment in the world than to say that God looks upon someone with respect. That's how God responded to Abel. Unfortunately, Cain's response also says a lot about his internal attitude toward God as well: ***“So Cain became very angry, and his expression was downcast” (NET).***

You see, Cain could said, *"God didn't care for my gift. I need to rethink this so I can bring God a gift that is acceptable to Him."* But he didn't. Cain had a different internal attitude towards God than Abel- and that internal attitude towards would soon manifest itself in a terrible external response.

The *external* problem was that Cain failed to offer God a gift that was worthy of Him. The internal problem with Cain's offering shows up on the back end of Genesis 4:5: ***"So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast."***

The word translated "angry" here in Genesis 4:5 means, *"to be hot, furious, to burn."*⁽¹⁾ This tells us that Cain didn't simply get mad about the situation; he got so furious that you could see the anger reflected in his face. This reaction to the fact that God didn't look favorably on his offering tells us a lot about Cain's mindset toward his Creator.

Here's why: Let's say you bring a gift to someone you love and care for, but that person rejects your gift. In that situation, how would you would feel? Would you feel sorrow? Disappointment? Sadness? Confusion? Regret? Perhaps a combination of those feelings? Well, those are the responses that we would normally expect to see in a situation where a gift is rejected by someone we care for.

Now let's take the opposite scenario. Let's say that we bring a gift to someone that we don't really care for. If that person rejects our gift, then how are we likely to respond? Well, most people would probably respond with disgust, annoyance or anger.

The point is that in both instances, our internal attitude towards someone else is likely to be expressed by our external response. Since Cain became furiously angry when God did not look favorably on his gift, that response tells us a lot about his internal attitude towards God.

(1) H2734 hara Strong's Hebrew and Greek Dictionaries <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/h2734/kjv/wlc/0-1/>

“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 [d]for you, but you should rule over it.” (Genesis 4:6-7).

We should note that God did not react toward Cain the way Cain reacted towards God. Instead, God responded very graciously- He basically said to Cain, *“If you do the right thing then everything will be OK between us.* But God also told him, *“...if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master” (NLT).*

This passage marks the very first appearance of the word “sin” in the Bible. While most people likely associate the word "sin" with something bad or wrong, there are many who might find this word difficult to define. Nevertheless, a good understanding of this word can help us grow in respect and appreciation for what God has done for us in Christ.

The Biblical concept of sin doesn't simply refer to the act of doing wrong. Instead, this word conveys the idea of "missing the mark." One way to illustrate the meaning of this word is to consider the image of an archer as he or she prepares to fire an arrow.

In this illustration, the archer releases the arrow and sends it on the way towards its intended destination. However, the arrow falls short in this instance and lands on the ground in front of the target. Thus, we can say that our archer has missed the mark. In other words, he or she has "sinned" by failing to hit the target that was set for him or her.

Much like the archer in our illustration, the Biblical definition of sin also involves "missing the mark." It means failing to live up to everything that God created us to be. Another definition of sin is "*a path, a life-style, or act deviating from that which God has marked out.*" (1) That's what God warned Cain about.

As the New Testament book of James tells us, **"...the person who keeps every law of God but makes one little slip is just as guilty as the person who has broken every law there is" (James 2:10 TLB).**

(1) H2403 chatta't *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers

"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).

Murder is defined as "the unlawful killing of one human being by another." (1) Based on the information given to us in Genesis 4:8, we can say that Cain would almost certainly be charged with criminal homicide in the death of his brother if he were to appear in a court of law today.

While it's possible that Cain and Abel had a spontaneous argument that resulted in Abel's death, a good detective would want to know why Cain invited Abel there to begin with. That's because...

1. The only reason Abel seemingly went to this field is because his brother invited him.
2. Cain's anger over the acceptance of his brother's sacrifice provided him with a motive to kill his brother when no one else was around.

In addition, Genesis 4:8 specifically tells us, ***"...while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother..."*** There is no indication that Abel provoked Cain in any way. Then there is the following excerpt from the New Testament book of 1 John: ***"Do not be 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" (1 John 3:12).***

This is why Cain would almost certainly be charged with murder if he was put on trial in the death of his brother today.

(1) *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* Copyright © 2006 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

We should also remember that God had given Cain a warning when he became angry over the rejection of his offering. Genesis 4:7 records that conversation for us: ***"...if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*** So God clearly warned Cain about the consequences that would follow his choices, but Cain apparently chose not to listen.

In one sense, God continues to repeat His warning to Cain to us today through the pages of His Word...

"When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear: sexual immorality, impurity, lustful pleasures, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, dissension, division, envy, drunkenness, wild parties, and other sins like these. Let me tell you again, as I have before, that anyone living that sort of life will not inherit the Kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21 NLT).

Cain's example thus reminds us that bad choices are likely to be followed by bad consequences. While it may be easy to assume that those consequences are limited to the person making that choice, those consequences often have a ripple effect upon others as well.

Let's consider the other individuals who were affected by Cain's decision to murder his brother. For instance, Abel's death certainly impacted his parents, Adam and Eve. Remember that Cain was their first child, and like any good parent, Adam and Eve probably had great hope for their first-born son. Perhaps they even entertained the idea that he might be the deliverer that God had promised so many years earlier in the Garden of Eden.

Cain and Abel were the first two children born to Adam and Eve- and now one of them was gone. And that meant that the first person ever born in the history of the human race also became the very first criminal born in the history of the human race.

"Then the Lord said to Cain, 'Where is Abel your brother?' He said, 'I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?'" (Genesis 4:9).

Perhaps Cain thought that he could hide his brother's murder by bringing him out to a remote location. But the truth is that nothing can ever be hidden from God. But God's question in this passage may prompt a question of our own: *"If God knows everything, then why did He ask where Abel was? Didn't He already know?"*

The answer to that question is easy if we remember that a question may serve as a test rather than a request for information. Notice that God didn't initiate His conversation with Cain with an accusation- He simply began with a question: ***"Where is your brother Abel?"***

Cain was faced with a test in responding to that question. He could choose to be honest with God about what he had done or he could choose to respond in some other manner. Unfortunately, Cain chose option number two.

Instead of responding to God in a respectful manner, Cain instead chose to give Him a sarcastic response: ***"... 'How should I know?' Cain retorted. 'Am I supposed to keep track of him wherever he goes?'" (Genesis 4:9 TLB).*** So once again, Cain's internal attitude toward his Creator was reflected in his external response.

When God questioned Adam and Eve following their act of disobedience in the Garden of Eden, they each responded to him in a respectful fashion. Unfortunately, Cain's response was very different. Not only did Cain murder an innocent man, he proceeded to make his crime worse through his flippant and disingenuous reply.

"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).

Remember that Cain was a farmer, so this punishment was quite severe. In essence, this verdict was an intensified version of the punishment Adam received for his sin in Genesis chapter three. So if growing food to eat was difficult for Adam, it was now going to be virtually impossible for Cain.

In addition, Cain was condemned to a bitter future- a future of continually drifting from region to region, looking for a home and a place of his own, but never quite finding that place.

"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).

Cain's reply offers another important clue regarding his attitude toward God. The Contemporary English Version of Genesis 4:13 tells us that Cain responded to God's verdict by saying, ***"This punishment is too hard!"***

In other words, Cain didn't feel bad about the fact that he did something wrong- he felt bad about the punishment he was about to receive for doing something wrong. Like many today, Cain's biggest regret was getting caught and having to face the consequences.

There is a significant distinction between regret for committing a misdeed and regret for being caught and penalized for committing a misdeed. The Bible talks about that difference in the Old Testament book of Proverbs: ***“He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy” (Proverbs 28:13).***

This portion of Scripture reminds us that it's not enough to simply feel sorry about doing wrong. Instead, we should be honest with God about the things we've done wrong. This brings us to the Biblical concept of repentance.

Genuine repentance involves to a change of mind that leads to a change in behavior. Repentance implies more than just a feeling of remorse, sorrow, or regret (although it may incorporate those responses). Genuine repentance involves a prayerful decision to turn from inappropriate behaviors, much like a motor vehicle that stops traveling in the wrong direction by making a U-turn. As we're told in the Biblical book of I John, ***“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).***

Unfortunately, Cain was focused on something else: ***"...anyone who finds me will kill me."*** Cain was apparently worried that someone else might do to him what he did to his brother. It seems that Cain feared that someone might eventually try to kill him for what he did to his brother.

It also appears that Cain's fear prompted a sudden change in his attitude toward God as well. Now that *his* life might be in danger, Cain pleaded with God saying, ***“My punishment is more than I can bear” (Genesis 4:13).*** He also stopped making sarcastic remarks like, ***“Am I supposed to be responsible for where he goes and what he does?” (Voice),*** now that he needed God's help.

But notice that while Cain's attitude toward God was revealed in the way he interacted with Him, God's attitude towards Cain was also revealed in the way He spoke to Cain. When Cain said, "whoever finds me will kill me," God could have replied by saying, ***"That's unfortunate- I guess you should have thought about that before murdering your brother and then making a wisecrack remark when I asked you where he was."***

Instead, God graciously placed a mark on Cain so anyone who found him would know not to kill him. Whatever that mark was, it served to protect Cain from anyone who might seek to treat him in the same way he had treated Abel.

“Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden” (Genesis 4:16).

The word "Nod" means "wandering" which certainly made it an appropriate place for someone who was condemned to be ***"...a restless wanderer on the earth" (Genesis 4:12).***

So this portion of Cain's account ends by providing us with an important example, for his experience reminds us that our actions have real consequences. God warned Cain that he was heading for trouble, but Cain chose to disregard that message. Like Cain, we also make real choices in real time on a daily basis. Those choices lead to real consequences that have a real eternal impact.

The choices we make, the things we do (or don't do), and the words we say will all become a part of the history of our lives- and those things influence others for better or worse. This may be one reason why Ephesians 5:15-18 tells us...

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is” (NIV).

“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 4:17).

This verse poses one of the most famous Biblical questions ever asked: who was Cain's wife? Given that Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel are the only human beings referenced in the Bible to this point, the question is, where did she come from?

We'll find one potential answer later in Genesis chapter five, where we find a long list of Adam's descendants. Since Adam lived for 930 years and “...***had other sons and daughters***” ([Genesis 5:4-5](#)), he certainly had time to father other children who are not mentioned in Genesis.

With this in mind, let's consider the possibility that each new generation of Adam's descendants produced another new generation every 20-25 years while their parents continued to have additional children. That would result in an enormous population explosion in a very brief period.

Under that scenario, we can say that Cain simply chose a wife from among the many eligible members of the female population. However, this would also mean that Cain's wife was probably a very close relative, or possibly one of his sisters. This was something the Old Testament Law strictly prohibited...

“If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They must be cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible” (Leviticus 20:17 NIV).

Marriage between close relatives also presents another concern as it raises the likelihood that genetic defects will appear in the children they bear. So how should we look at these issues?

First, we should remember that Cain's marriage took place before the Levitical prohibition against such relationships went into effect. Next, the human “gene pool” was probably much cleaner in those earlier generations. Early human genetics were likely pure enough to permit intermarriage between close relatives without the hereditary issues we might encounter today. However, there came a time when God saw fit to prohibit such marriages, as we see in Leviticus 20:17.

“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).

So these verses provide a list of those who descended from Adam and Eve's son Cain. That roster

includes Cain 's great-great-great grandson Lamech, the first recorded example of someone who rejected the marriage standard of one man and one woman that God had established in the Garden of Eden.

Lamech's wives gave birth to three sons who played significant roles in human history. The first was named Jabal, and he became humanity's first nomadic herdsman. That allowed people to easily relocate in search of good pastures for domestic animals such as camels, donkeys, goats, and sheep.

Next was a man named Jubal. While his brother Jabal was an outdoorsman, Jubal had a more artistic nature, for he was a musician who played various wind and string instruments.

Finally, there was a third man named Tubal-Cain who went on to become history's first metal worker. Tubal-Cain was the forerunner of the modern-day machinist and he developed the methods and procedures for casting and forging objects from iron and bronze. In light of his ability to create and develop various metal tools, Tubal-Cain's work would have been important in helping farmers plant and harvest enough food to feed the growing human population..

So these verses describe three highly skilled individuals at a very early point in human history. While it is true that human advancements have become more complex and sophisticated over time, these Scriptures offer a glimpse into the potential for human achievement at this early stage of development.

“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).

Given that Lamech's statement was confined to his own two wives, it may be difficult to take this grandiose declaration of self-praise seriously. Nevertheless, he felt compelled to say, ***“If someone who kills Cain is punished seven times, then the one who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times!” (NLT).***

How Lamech sought to execute that judgment is unclear, but he apparently felt that he was capable of levying a greater sentence than his Creator imposed upon Cain. But Lamech's pretentious bluster didn't amount to much, for he and his descendants are never heard from again in the Scriptures.

So it seems that Adam's descendants (like Cain and Lamech) were quickly moving away from a God-honoring perspective- but that wasn't true of everyone...

“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 4:23-24).

The name Seth means “appointed” and it seems that Eve felt that he was the replacement for Abel, the righteous man that Cain murdered. Seth will become an important individual, for his lineage will eventually produce other Godly men such as Noah, Abraham, David, and ultimately, Jesus Himself.

We're also told that, ***“...men began to call on the name of the LORD”*** during that time as well. This may imply that some individuals began to seek God in prayer or even inaugurate a form of corporate worship. Whatever this meant, it marked the first time in history that a significant number of people began to turn to God in faith.