

# Cain and Abel

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**The second message** in our Summer series on the book of Genesis—In the Beginning—is the account of Cain and Abel. I invite you to turn to Genesis 4.

**Genesis 4:1-2 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." <sup>2</sup> Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.**

We are given very little details in this account, which is true in so many places in Scripture. We would like to know so much more, but God's Word contains only what He considered essential for us to know. For example, we are not told about other children Adam and Eve obviously had during this time. That was not necessary for the point God was trying to make here. It just says they had these two boys. And the next verses jump right to them having grown to the point where they were working.

But before we move on, it is worth noting that Eve sees the birth of Cain as a gift of God. **With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.** It is quite possible that she thought he might be the one God promised after the Fall, the one who would crush the head of Satan. At the very least, she understood that the birth of this child was a sign of God's mercy and that He would keep His promise of rescue.

**Genesis 4: Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. <sup>3</sup> In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of ● his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup> but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. <sup>6</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? ● Why is your face downcast? <sup>7</sup> 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."**

Abel tended animals, Cain farmed the soil. They both offered sacrifices to God. The words here do not tell us directly or plainly why the sacrifice of Abel was accepted by God but the sacrifice of Cain was not. Was God playing favorites? No, there was more to it than that.

First of all, it says that **Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil** while **Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn.** It appears to have more to do with the attitude of heart rather than the gift itself. And the New Testament gives us further explanation of this account and the difference between the two offerings.

**Hebrews 11:4<sup>4</sup> By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.**

Abel offered his sacrifice from faith. Cain was just going through the motions. Yet that did not keep him from being offended when Abel was looked on with favor and he was not. Cain's reaction could be seen on his face. He was upset, unhappy and angry. God confronts him, asking why he is so upset: ***If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?*** That question God asks of Cain tells us that he had not done what was right, and that is why his offering was not accepted. Cain didn't want to hear that, anymore than you like to be confronted when you have done something wrong. But God continues with a warning that this attitude and behavior will lead to further sin: ... ***if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.***

We can look back on this account and see what is coming even before it happens. You can just feel that Cain will not listen to this warning. You know that sin is going to master him rather than the other way around. It is a pity we lack the ability to see things as clearly in our own lives. The same warning applies to us all ... ***if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*** Cain did not.

***<sup>8</sup> 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.***

The attitude of Cain's heart that I mentioned earlier is revealed in how He reacts to God's rebuke. **Cain kills his brother.** An act of murder. Taking a human life. This was a rejection of God's authority and a total disregard for the gift of life He has given. Jesus spoke of this kind of heart trouble:

***Matthew 15:19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.***

Just as He had done with Cain's parents, God comes to confront Cain in his disobedience. Note how he offers him the chance to admit his sin and repent, an opportunity Cain ignores.

***<sup>9</sup> Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" <sup>10</sup> The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground.***

Not only does Cain reject the chance to admit his sin, but further compounds it by trying to lie to God, in effect saying “How should I know where my brother is – I’m not responsible for him.” The truth of the matter is that he was responsible for what had happened.

*Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground.* Throughout Scripture, blood is the symbol of life. Sacrifices involved the shedding of blood, which was the offering of a life. Even the kosher and dietary laws of God for His people reflected this

***Deuteronomy 12:23 But be sure you do not eat the blood, because the blood is the life...***

They were reminded of the connection between blood and life every time a sacrifice was offered on the altar, as the blood poured out of the animals being offered. A point you should not miss here is that Abel’s blood serves as a reminder of the blood of another victim - one who willingly offered His life, shedding His blood to take away the sins of the world. Jesus offered His life – His blood - as

***1 John 2:2 ...the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.***

God next pronounces judgment and consequences for Cain. In doing so, He also shows mercy to him just as He had earlier shown mercy to his parents.

***<sup>11</sup> Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup> When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth.” <sup>13</sup> Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear. <sup>14</sup> 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.” <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> So Cain went out from the Lord’s presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.***

The **judgment** has two parts:

1. The ground would no longer produce crops for Cain
2. He would be an outcast from other people, a wanderer.

(By the way, this tells us that Adam and Eve had other children – they made up the community who would not associate with Cain.)

Cain brought this judgment upon himself. He was receiving the deserved punishment for his actions. By his behavior, he had alienated himself from God, and his punishment confirmed that separation sin causes.

The amazing thing here is the mercy God shows to an unrepentant Cain. You've probably heard mention of "the mark of Cain" at some point in your life. It is often understood to be something negative, but was in fact a way to protect him from those who might seek to take his life. It was totally undeserved, an act of kindness on God's part.

This act of mercy reminds me of the way God continues to be merciful to undeserving mankind. Even today, God provides food and shelter and everything necessary for life to those who reject Him. Most importantly, He continues to offer the chance for all people to repent, believe in Jesus, and receive the free gift of salvation that He has earned for everyone. **God's compassion and mercy is seen most clearly in Jesus Christ.** He let Himself be killed for our offenses, and rose from the dead to announce the victory over death that He shares with all who believe in Him.

While we are not given all the details we would like to have in this account, God exposes in Cain a problem common to us all – a heart that is inclined to go against what He would have us do. And we are equally convicted of our wrongdoing when we hear that question asked of Cain that was previously asked of his parents: "What have you done?" The good news for you is that God is merciful. He does not abandon you in that condition. And when you consider how Jesus Christ has provided the solution for the problem of sin, reconciling us to God, making us clean and forgiven and restored, you can ask the same question of God with a sense of overwhelming awe and gratitude: "Lord, what have you done?"