

# Cain and Abel, a Sinner and a Saint

Genesis 4:1-26

with Rockey's Thoughts, October 11, 2020

## Outline

- I. Cain and Abel, Gen 4:1-26.
  - A. Birth of Cain and Abel, Gen 4:1-2.
  - B. Cain and Abel bring offerings to the Lord, Gen 4:3-7.
  - C. Cain kills his brother Abel, Gen 4:8.
  - D. The Lord confronts Cain and places a curse on him, Gen 4:9-15.
  - E. The Family of Cain, Gen 4:16-24.
  - F. Birth of Seth, Gen 4:25-26.

## Bible Story of Cain and Abel

**4:1** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the LORD." **2** Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. **3** And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. **4** Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, **5** but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

**6** So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? **7** 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 for you, but you should rule over it."

**8** 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.

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

He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"

**10** And He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground. **11** So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. **12** 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."

**13** And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! **14** 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."

**15** 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.

**16** Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. **17** 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. **18** To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad begot Mehujael, and Mehujael begot Methushael, and Methushael begot Lamech.

**19** Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. **20** And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.

## Can and Abel, a Sinner and a Saint

**21** His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. **22** 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.

**23** 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.

**24** If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold,  
Then Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

**25** 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.” **26** 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.

### **Rockey's Thoughts**

(4:1-2) We begin with the backstory. Adam and Eve begin a family. They have two sons, Cain and Abel. Cain grows up to be a farmer and Abel becomes a shepherd. Imagining what we would see in a picture book, the first image might be our couple Adam and Eve. This would be followed by Adam adoring a pregnant Eve, then a picture with a new baby. This would continue with Adam and a young Cain looking on a pregnant Eve. Then our couple with Cain and a new baby. Pictures of a growing family would follow until we see a mature Cain working in the fields, planting and reaping a harvest, while Abel is shepherding a flock of sheep.

(4:3-5a) The story continues with what appears to be a harvest festival. Cain brought an offering of his produce and Abel brought a firstborn lamb from his flock. Now the story gets interesting as the Lord accepted Abel's offering, but rejected Cain's offering. In our picture book we might imagine a feast with Cain bringing the bounty of his harvest and Abel providing the meat. In the next two pictures we would see the Lord smiling in approval of Abel's gift and then frowning with disapproval on Cain's offering. This is a mystery to be solved. What would cause God to accept one offering and reject the other offering? Some suggest that the lamb was the proscribed offering for sin and refer to the Lord covering Adam and Eve's shame with animal skins. This is an important point and I agree that the forgiveness of sin requires the shedding of innocent blood, but I doubt it was the case in this instance. First, there was no suggestion of sin on the part of either Cain or Abel. Second, if they were offerings for sin would they not have been offered independently after each sinned instead of together? Third, when Moses codified the law it included offerings for different occasions and for several reasons including sin and thanksgiving. Also, some of the offerings were burned with fire while other offerings were eaten at a feast. Fourth and finally, we have the clue that the offerings were “in the process of time.” Going back to the story of creation we remember that God set the rhythms of time: days, weeks, months, seasons and years. This sounds and looks like a harvest festival that came at a recurring time, much like the harvest celebration feast that we call Thanksgiving.

(4:5b-7) When the Lord rejects his offering, Cain gets angry and begins to pout. The Lord asks Cain why he is angry and pouting. Then the Lord tries to correct and encourage Cain. In our picture book this might be depicted by a picture of Cain with his back to God, his arms are folded and he has an angry look on his face. The next pages would add to the picture by putting thought bubbles above the

## Can and Abel, a Sinner and a Saint

Lord's head depicting Cain doing good, doing evil, sinning and then overcoming evil and sin. Now we have some clues that reveal why Cain's offering was rejected. A humble person who wants a right relationship with God and to do what the Lord wants (righteousness) would try to understand what they did that was displeasing to the Lord and correct it. A proud person who believes that their works (self-righteousness) will please God would become angry when they are rejected. They turn away from the Lord and they are jealous of those who are accepted by Him. Even with the Lord Himself trying to correct and encourage Cain, he does not repent. Cain's heart is not right with the Lord and we know that the Lord judges the heart of a person along with their actions. This is an attitude issue that we see in all of life. I've seen it in school, in the military, in the workplace and elsewhere. The humble have a submitted relationship with their teachers, officers, bosses and others who exercise legitimate authority over them. When they are corrected for doing something wrong they accept it and learn how to do it right. The self-righteous, in their pride, reject authority. They believe that their efforts are good enough and their actions should not only be acceptable, but praised. When corrected, their pride is hurt and they react with anger and they sulk. In 1Peter 5:5 we are encouraged to have a proper attitude: "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.'"

(4:8) One day Cain talks with his brother Abel. The discussion becomes heated and while they argue Cain strikes and kills his brother Abel. This would be depicted by pictures of Cain and Abel talking and arguing. There might be thought bubbles depicting the acceptance of Abel's offering and the rejection of Cain's gift. Then there would be a picture of Cain striking Abel a mortal blow and finally an image of a bloodied Abel lying dead upon the ground with his brother Cain standing over him. We all know how this discussion goes. We have all been on one side of the argument or maybe both sides at different times. Cain would complain about how unfair it was for God to reject his perfectly good offering. Abel, in an effort to help his brother, would point out what Cain did that displeased the Lord. Cain would reject his brother's attempt to help with a statement like: "You think you know so much" or "It makes me so mad, you think you are better than me!" The self-righteous believe that they and their words are perfectly acceptable. To their way of thinking, the only way someone could correct them would be if the other person knew more than them or the other person was better than them. Since they and their actions are perfect, this cannot be so. The offer of help further wounds their pride and makes them mad. Cain did not repent. He allowed the anger from his wounded pride and his jealousy to grow until it broke forth in the sin of murdering his own brother.

(4:9-10) God confronts Cain and gives him a chance to confess. Cain compounds his sin and lies. He questions if it is his job to look after his brother. God counters Cain's lies with the truth. In the first picture God would be confronting Cain with a thought bubble over the Lord's head containing a picture of Abel. The next picture would show Cain in the posture of "I don't know" and something that depicts the question "Is it my job to take care of my brother?" The third picture would have thought bubbles over the Lord's head depicting Cain killing his brother. How could anyone think that God wouldn't know the truth, especially someone who had talked with God face to face?

(4:11-15) The Lord places a curse of rejection on Cain in response to his sin. Cain will be rejected by the ground that he tills, other people and God. Cain complains that his punishment is too severe and that someone will kill him. The Lord replies that Cain will be protected by a seven-fold vengeance and He puts a mark on Cain so everyone will know who Cain is. Our picture book would continue with the Lord and Cain. The Lord would have a thought bubble depicting Cain having small harvests, moving

## Can and Abel, a Sinner and a Saint

from place to place and being separated from God. Then one with bubbles over Cain's head showing him with a load that is more than he can bare and someone killing him. After that would be one with a bubble over the Lord's head with a picture of someone receiving seven-fold retribution for anyone who kills Cain. It would also show the Lord putting a mark of some kind to distinguish Cain. This is the second story in a row where a curse is placed on a person who sins. The scriptures do not describe the mark that was placed on Cain. Some believe that it was four intersecting lines with a separation of 45 degrees between each line. This would look like a four line asterisk. Either filling in between the lines or connecting the ends of the lines would create an octagon. I don't know if this is right or not, but it might be something to consider and watch for.

(4:16-24) This section gives a little history of Cain's family. After five generations, one of Cain's descendants tells his wives that he killed a man for wounding him. He goes on to boast that if Cain is avenged seven-fold, then he will be avenged seventy-seven-fold. We can imagine pictures showing Cain leaving the presence of the Lord, building a city and growing his family. After that would be a picture of a man and his two wives. Over the man's head would be bubbles showing a man wounding him and him killing the man. Another bubble would show Cain avenged seven-fold and the man avenged seventy-seven-fold. We see no change or repentance in Cain. He never enters into a submitted relationship with the Lord and he lives in self-righteous separation from God. Spirits of anger, jealousy and murder grow in Cain's family until, after five generations, they are more than ten times stronger than they were in Cain.

(4:25-26) Our story ends back with Adam and Eve. They have another son Seth and Eve considers him to be a gift from God to replace her murdered son Abel. The final statement is: "Then men began to call on the name of the Lord." The pictures would be Adam and a pregnant Eve followed by Adam and Eve with a new baby. The last picture would be some depiction of an ancient religious assembly. At the end of the story we come back to Adam and Eve having more children. Then I take the last statement to mean that self-righteous people begin formal religion in an effort to make themselves acceptable to God by their works.

There are several global truths we can take away from the story of Cain and Abel. Just like in the story of Adam and Eve, here again, sin brings with it a curse. For Cain's original sin of murder, God places a curse of rejection on him. Cain is rejected by the environment, other people and God. The ground that Cain works will give him smaller returns. People will reject Cain and he will be forced to move from place to place. Perhaps worst of all, as Cain himself observes, he will no longer enjoy face to face intimacy with the Lord God. Again we see that there are consequences for sin and it diminishes what our life might have been.

When we do not repent and turn from our sin, when we continue to leave it unchecked, it will grow and get worse. We see this twice in this story. First when Cain refuses to repent, the anger and jealousy from his wounded pride leads him to murder his brother Abel. Second, the sin of pride remains unchecked in Cain's family line and after the passing of five generations we see one of his descendants murder another man for an undisclosed wounding. Lamech killed a man that hurts him. Could it have been as slight as wounded pride and hurt feelings? By not dealing appropriately with the generational sins of pride, self-righteousness, anger and murder, they have grown ten fold in just a few generations.

Cain continued in pride and never repented. He would never allow himself to accept the free gift of reconciliation with the Lord that his parents received. Instead, in his self-righteousness, he continued to believe that his works would make him acceptable to God. This led Cain and his descendants to

## Can and Abel, a Sinner and a Saint

formalize a religion. Remember the long lifespan enjoyed by Adam and his descendants? Cain would still have been alive after many generations had followed him. Throughout history, self-righteous people of religion have persecuted and killed those God has anointed and sent to help them. In the seventh woe that the Lord Jesus Christ pronounced on the religious hypocrites of his day, He said in Matthew 23:29-36:

**29** “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, **30** and say, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ **31** Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. **32** Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. **33** Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? **34** Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, **35** that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. **36** Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.”

Only a short time later they murdered their own Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary. This has continued to our day and will continue as long as the righteous and the self-righteous live together.

Nearly thirty years ago I was teaching a Sunday School class and a man asked me if one religion wasn't just as good as another. After all, all religions were seeking to teach people about God. I answered that they weren't all the same. Most religions teach that man is made acceptable to God by their works. Only Judaism and Christianity taught a salvation based on faith. There is nothing really wrong with that answer, but today I would give a different answer. I would agree that every religion is equal. They are all equally futile. No religion and no work will lead to a sinner's salvation. God is seeking people with the humility to enter into a submitted relationship with Him based on faith. The advantage that Jews and Christians have is the Bible. In it the oracles of God are recorded and they teach us these things.

Beginning with the first two brothers, this Bible story gives a picture of the difference between God's redeemed saints and sinners.<sup>1</sup> Three stark differences are portrayed between the righteous obeying God's specific will for them and the self-righteous doing their own will. The three differences are: faith vs. works, humility vs. pride and relationship vs. religion. God lets us know that he is looking for relationship with us and not religion from us. The humble relate to the Lord in faith and the Lord reckons it as righteousness. The proud believe that their self-righteous works of religion will make them acceptable to God apart from a submitted relationship. Speaking of Abel the Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:4, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.” About Cain the Bible testifies in 1 John 3:11-12, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous.” Concerning self-righteousness the Bible tells us in Isaiah 64:4, “But we are all like an unclean thing,

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<sup>1</sup> See “[Saints and Sinners](#).”

## Can and Abel, a Sinner and a Saint

and all our righteousnesses are like filthy<sup>2</sup> rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” This makes it absolutely clear that it was Abel's faith that made his offering righteous before the Lord. At the same time, Cain's self-righteous works were seen as evil in God's sight. Abel shows faithful humility in his submitted relationship with the Lord. Cain is prideful and believes he can make himself acceptable to God by his works of religion. Yes, the story of Cain and Abel gives us a clear illustration of the difference between a sinner and one of God's saints.

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2 Filthy: Strong's Hebrew 5708, אַדָּם, ed (ayd) – filthy. From an unused root meaning to set a period (compare adah, uwd); the menstrual flux (as periodical); by implication (in plural) soiling -- filthy.