

Genesis 4:1-8

Today we move on to Genesis 4 which can be divided into three sections; the first deals with the story of Cain and Abel in verses 1-15 while the second part, verses 16-24, deals with the line of Cain while the last two verses, 25 and 26, discuss the line of Seth.

Cain and Abel, verses 1-15

The narrative really has two parts; the first in verses 1-8 (which we can call the murder of Abel), starts with the birth of the two men, discusses their professions, their sacrificial offerings to God, and then concludes with Abel's murder. The second part (the curse of Cain) then deals with God's response and His curse upon Cain in verses 9-15.

The Murder of Abel, verses 1-8

Vs 1a, Adam^[a] made love to his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. ^[b]

God had told Adam and Eve in Gen 1:28 they were to *be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.* In other words they were to have children and take dominion (authority) over the earth -both its inanimate and animate forms. They were to rule it as stewards or regents.

This command became much more complicated after the fall for now they would both have to work much harder to provide for themselves as the ground had become cursed. They would now have to compete with thorns and thistles to make the ground produce grain. Additionally the curse of Gen 3:16 on Eve made conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and child rearing much more difficult. Yet part of the promise to them was that a seed from the woman would come forth and crush Satan's head, and to Adam and Eve (I postulate) this meant the curses God had proclaimed would all be lifted.

This expectation helps explain the second part of the verse.

Vs 1b, She said, *"With the help of the Lord I have brought forth^[a] a man.*

The Hebrew literally reads, I have gotten a man, Jehovah. This is a profound statement for it indicates that Eve understood from Gen 3:15 (*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring^[a] and hers; he will crush^[b] your head, and you will strike his heel*) that the offspring of the woman would be a God-man. Note what she says, I have brought forth a man, YVWH. In other words when Cain was born, Eve declares this is the offspring of Gen 3:15, who is the God-man, which will crush Satan's head. She had the right theology but the wrong application.

Vs 2a, *Later she gave birth to his brother Abel.*

Now in verse 2a Eve gives birth to Abel. The Hebrew word for Abel is hevel which means vanity. It comes from a root that means breath or vapor. It emphasizes the brevity and meaninglessness of life. It is used in Job 7:16, *Let me alone for my days are vanity* (KJV, the NIV says without meaning). It is also used in Ps 144:4, *Man is like to vanity, his days are a shadow that passeth away* (KJV, the NIV says his days are like a breath). Where am I going with this? It means by the time Abel is born, Eve is feeling the effects of the

curse. The hope of Cain had failed and Eve responds by naming her second son, vanity, meaninglessness, breath.

Vs 2b, Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil.

Verse 2b explains the professions of both men. We know from Gen 1:30 and 2:17 the diet of both men is still vegetarian. Abel is a shepherd and keeps flocks which were used for three things, their milk, their wool, and for sacrifice.

Cain is a farmer and works the soil. He raises grain, cultivates vegetables, and tends fruit. We know from Gen 3:17 -18, this is the profession of Adam as well, so the firstborn emulates his father and tills the ground. Both professions are reputable and honorable. Both were necessary for the needs of the day.

We now come to verses 3 and 4 which detail and contrast the offerings each man made to God. We begin with Cain in verse 3.

Vs 3, In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord.

The verse opens with this interesting phrase, *in the course of time* (the KJV says *in the process of time* while the NLT says *at the end of Harvest*). In the Hebrew this reads at the “end of days,” meaning at a specific time. Already in the course of early human history, Cain and Abel understood there was a specific appointed time to bring an offering to the Lord. It also implies a regularly prescribed time (this is why the NLT says *at the end of harvest*).

Assuming this offering occurred at a regularly prescribed time it meant both men knew what was expected of them. And because Abel’s blood sacrifice was accepted and Cain’s grain offering was not, we can infer that prior to this event, both men knew a blood sacrifice was required. Therefore, this was not the first time Cain had brought an offering. Previously, in order to have a blood sacrifice, and since Cain was a farmer and Abel was a shepherd, Cain would have bought a goat or lamb from Abel. However this time Cain chose not to do this. This time he brought an offering of the fruit of the soil that was bloodless. We are not told where this place of offering was or how frequently they had performed it. Perhaps it was at the border of the Garden where the Shekinah glory prevented them from entering. Then in verse 4 we are informed of Abel’s sacrifice.

Vs 4a, And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.

Abel now brings his offering, which is different than Cain’s, in the following respects. First it is a first-born. This is the dawn of human history and already the role of the firstborn is important. The firstborn was considered consecrated to God. Whether man or animal, the firstborn enjoyed premature because their presence signified Gods faithfulness and gift. So to return a firstborn to God was to honor Him who first gave it. Second, Abel’s offering was one of blood as signified by the fat portions of one of the first born of his flock.

So two different offerings, one of the fruit of the soil, with no mention of it being the first crop, and another, the fat portion of a first born animal that was presented with blood. Some have argued that the difference between these two sacrifices was one of attitude; that it didn’t matter what the sacrifice

was, what mattered was the attitude or heart of the two men. This is a wrong concept. The basis for the difference between the two was Abel brought blood which meant an animal had been killed, and Cain did not. The book of Hebrews helps make this argument as Heb 11:4 says, *By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did.*

Both Cain and Abel had the same parents. Both were born outside the garden. Both had the same upbringing. Both had the same knowledge. Both were sinners. Yet Cain chooses to bring an offering, not of faith, but of the soil and his labor; and Abel, an offering by faith, that is not of his labor, but by blood.

We see God's response in 4b and 5a.

Vs 4b and 5a, *The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor.*

Note God had favor on Abel's offering for it was a firstborn and with blood but not with Cain's offering because it was not the first fruit and it did not come with blood.

Vs 5b, *So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

We now see Cain's response to God's response. I find it interesting to ask the question, "how did God meet them? In other words, how did God accept one and not the other, and how did God express his favor to one and not the other? We are not told. But we do see Cain's response, *he was very angry and his face was down cast.* Anger is the emotion we feel when we have been disrespected, slighted, unjustly treated, threatened, or when we are frustrated by shattered expectations. It is an emotion that is closely tied to our fight or flight response. It is powerful and self-protecting. We see lots of people today who bring the fruit of their achievements before God as Cain did with his fruit, and when God tells them their works, and their achievements won't cut it with Him, they are angry and mad. They say to themselves, God can't reject me or treat me like that! Therefore, Cain felt disrespected, slighted and unjustly treated by God because God did not accept his sacrifice. Note Cain is also *downcast*. The idea here is sullenness, depression, jealousy, and bitterness. Jude 11 comments on this when talking of false prophets, *Woe to them! They have taken the way of Cain.* What is the way of Cain? It is rejecting God's way and then getting angry and sullen when God does not accept your way.

Vs 6, *Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?"*

So God reads Cain's emotional status. By the way, God has great emotional intelligence. He knows the emotional status of your heart. God now asks two rhetorical questions, *Why are you angry? And why are you downcast?* These questions are similar to the ones in Gen 3 when God asked Cain's parents *where are you? And who told you were naked?* These were intended to illicit a confession. God now gives Cain an off ramp in verse 7a.

Vs 7a, *If you do what is right, will you not be accepted?*

God now confronts Cain and offers him an out. *If you do what is right*—what is that? If you bring an acceptable sacrifice -*will you not be accepted?* God is saying, Cain, you don't have to be angry, you don't have to be depressed, sullen, jealous, self-absorbed, and bitter. Just do things my way and you will be

fine. By the way, this same invitation is open to us. We get frustrated and angry and mad at God when we reject his ways of doing things, yet He graciously offers us an off ramp and a way to get right with Him. 1 Jn 1:9 says *if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us of all unrighteousness*. Then God gives Cain a warning in vs 7b.

Vs 7b, *But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*

God now gives Cain a stern warning. If you do not do what is right—i.e. if you don't reverse course and offer a sacrifice in the way I have prescribed, then Sin will have you. Moses writes *sin is crouching at the door* and *desires to have you*. The picture here is of sin as an animal sulking in your heart, awaiting a time to pounce as a predator lurking for its prey. Sin is watching, waiting, lurking, poised and ready to strike, when the right opportunity arises. The Hebrew word for desire is teshugah which means an intense craving, longing, or desire. The phrase *to have you*, means to control, to have dominion, and rule. So here God paints a picture of Cain's heart. Look Cain, if you don't get right with me, Sin is in your heart and ready to pounce. It craves to control, animate, and dominate you. God then gives Cain one last warning, *you must rule over it*. The idea here is you have free agency and thus a moral choice as to how you want to proceed. Either rule over it—fight sin and control its urges—and do what is right, or let sin take over and rule your heart. We see the choice Cain makes in vs 8.

Vs 8, *Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field."*^[d] *While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.*

Humanity is only a few years old and so far there are only four recorded people in existence, all belonging to the same family; and now one brother murders another. This is homicide and fratricide. Abel's murder is in the first degree. It is premeditated, calculated, and conducted without witness. Cain *said to his brother Abel, let's go out to the field*. Abel is unsuspecting. He has done nothing wrong. Cain desires to take him *out in the field*, the idea is no one will see what I have purposed. We then read, while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Moses doesn't go into any gory details, only that the act was done. Mt 23:35 and Lk 11:51 state that Abel was a *righteous man*. 1 Jn 3:12 gives a bit more commentary of what happened, *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*. Cain is an example of the sin equation of Jm 1:13-14, *When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone;¹⁴ but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed.¹⁵ Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death*. The sin equation is this; temptation + thought + time = birth -action-death (3T=BAD). Cain was tempted; he thought of his jealousy and anger at God and Abel (because we always want to project our dissatisfaction with God on some person); he had time to ruminate on these things; his desire gave birth to a plan, which led to an action, he took his brother to the field, and then there was death, for Abel was murdered. This is the first recorded murder in the Bible and next week we will see God's response and judgement.