

Cain and Abel

In Genesis 3 mankind suffered a devastating Fall and was evicted from the Garden of Eden. As we all know, however, that is not the end of the story. In the next chapter Adam and Eve start a family:

Genesis 4:1: “And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.
2 And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.”

Cain was born before Abel, which makes him Abel's older brother. The text doesn't say how many years separated the two brothers, but it does seem safe to say that Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's first two sons.

According to Strong's Concordance, the name Cain means “spear” and the name Abel means “vanity”. These names are actually important – there's something going on here that is not immediately apparent. You see, the Hebrew text of verse 1 does not have the words “from the”; that phrase was added by translators. What the verse actually says is this: “I have gotten a man, the Lord”.

The reason this is significant is because when God judged the serpent in the Garden of Eden He made a promise:

Genesis 3:14: “And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:
15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

Verse 15 is actually a Messianic prophecy that looks forward to the crucifixion. The crucifixion accomplished two things: Christ died (and thus the reference to “bruise his heel”), and Satan was defeated (and thus the reference to “bruise thy head”). Eve understood this prophecy and assumed that her firstborn son Cain was the promised Messiah – “the Lord”. She named him “spear” because she thought that God would use him to destroy the devil. She must have realized her mistake pretty quickly, though, because she named her second son “vanity”. Eve thought that the Messiah was going to come immediately, but the Messiah did not actually come until approximately 4,000 years later.

The Bible does not tell us anything about the childhood of Cain and Abel. What we do know is that one day the two brothers made offerings to the Lord:

Genesis 4:3: “And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.
4 And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. . .”

People have made a lot of assumptions about these verses that are not actually true. For example, there is no evidence that God commanded them to give this offering. The Mosaic Law does have a long list of required offerings, but that Law was not given until thousands of years later. The laws that Moses gave regarding sacrifices and offerings *cannot* be applied to these verses! Cain and

Abel would have been completely unaware of them. There is no hint in the passage that God had required something or that Cain and Abel were trying to get their sins forgiven.

We also need to realize that Cain's offering is the first one that is mentioned. It is quite likely that *Cain* made his offering first, and Abel only made his offering *after* Cain did. There is no evidence that Cain was copying Abel. In fact, the very first person ever recorded as making an offering to God is *Cain*.

Some people have argued that God was upset with Cain's offering because it was “of the fruit of the ground”, while Abel's offering was “of the firstlings of his flock”. It is true that Abel offered a blood sacrifice and Cain did not. However, there is nothing in the text to indicate that grain offerings were prohibited. When people today think of offerings they usually think of animal sacrifices, but the levitical system had other types of offerings as well. There were even grain and drink (wine) offerings! Even if the Mosaic Law was binding at the time (and it was *not*), a grain offering would have been perfectly fine. The issue had nothing to do with *what* Cain offered.

What we see is that Cain offered something he had grown and Abel offered something he had raised. Both gave of the work of their hands. The offering was something they had raised, not something they purchased. Cain was a farmer and offered the bounty of his land; Abel was a shepherd and offered the bounty of his flock. They were both perfectly logical choices and they both made sense. *The problem was not the offering itself.*

(As a side-note, notice that the professions of farming and raising sheep appeared extremely early in human history! It did not take people millions of years to learn how to farm or how to raise livestock. Early man was quite intelligent. Cain and Abel were *not* brutish cavemen who spent their time grunting at each other. The advancement of mankind was extremely rapid.)

The passage goes on to say that the Lord had very different reactions to the two offerings:

Genesis 4:4: “. . . And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering:
5 But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. . . .”

Notice the very precise language of this passage. We tend to focus on the offerings, but the Bible clearly says that “the Lord had respect unto *Abel* and to his offering”. The actual person is mentioned *before* the offering! The verse is not saying “The Lord respected Abel's offering, and that offering made Abel acceptable to God”. What it actually says is this: “The Lord respected Abel, and therefore He respected Abel's offering”. The reason the Lord had respect for Abel's offering is because *He respected Abel*. The reason the Lord rejected Cain's offering is because *He did not respect Cain*.

The same thing is true today. Jesus had tremendous respect for the small offering of the poor widow, even though the monetary amount that she gave was utterly insignificant:

Mark 12:41: “And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much.
42 And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.
43 And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury:
44 For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.”

However, God has no respect at all for the offerings of the wicked, regardless of how large they might be:

Proverbs 15:8: "The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD; but the prayer of the upright is his delight."

Proverbs 15:29: "The LORD is far from the wicked; but he heareth the prayer of the righteous."

People who don't know the Lord often think that if they just give money to the poor, or make a donation to church, or do some good deed, that the Lord will see their offering and accept them. However, they are quite wrong. The Lord *despises* the gifts and offerings of the wicked. Their sacrifices are an abomination in His sight. He does not hear their self-righteous prayers and He does not accept their gifts. You cannot earn God's favor by bribing Him with gifts because God cannot be bought. God will only accept your gifts *if He has already accepted you*. It does not work the other way around. In fact, Jesus gave a stern warning about this:

Matthew 7:21: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

22 Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?

23 And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

Jesus is saying that when He returns there will be many people who think they are Christians but who will end up rejected. The true Christian is one who has repented of his sins and believed on Christ (which, according to John 6:40, is "the will of my Father"). However, there are many false Christians who have rejected the lordship of Christ and have refused to turn their lives over to Jesus. Instead, they have based their salvation on their own works. They spend their lives doing "many wonderful works" and assume that those works are buying God's favor. When Jesus returns they will try to claim that their works have earned them salvation, and they will be rejected. Jesus will plainly tell them "I *never* knew you". They were never saved at all; they were just deluding themselves. You cannot earn your salvation through works and you cannot bribe God into liking you. A Christian's relationship with God is based on grace, not works.

Cain and Abel are a classic example of this. Both brothers made offerings to God. The works were the same, but Cain was rejected and Abel was not! What's the difference between Cain and Abel? The New Testament tells us that it was a matter of *faith*:

Hebrews 11:4: "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

In other words, *Abel had faith* and Cain did not. Abel made his offering in faith and God respected that faith. Cain lacked faith and so God rejected his offering. Faith and faith alone was the difference between Cain and Abel. (It is also the difference between every saved person and every lost

person.)

Cain quickly realized that he had been rejected, and he did not take it very well:

Genesis 4:5: “. . .And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

6 And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

7 If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.”

Cain noticed that God accepted Abel and rejected him. Instead of seeking understanding and repentance, however, Cain simply got angry about it. The Lord warned him that he was going down the wrong path but Cain ignored God's warning. Rather than repenting of his sin and turning from it, he chose to seek out and murder the one who had faithfully served the Lord:

Genesis 4:8: “And 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 slew him.”

The fact that Cain would actually murder Abel is rather astonishing. Cain had to know that he wouldn't get away with it. When Adam and Eve sinned, the Lord was immediately aware of it and confronted them. Cain would have known this but it didn't stop him. If Cain wanted to keep this a secret he failed spectacularly – this is one of the most famous murders in all of history! The one fact that everyone knows about Cain is that he murdered his brother.

The New Testament tells us exactly why Cain did this:

1 John 3:12: “Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.”

In other words, Cain was furious that his brother was righteous. He couldn't stand the fact that his brother was not wicked, so he went out and killed his brother. Cain had a passionate hatred for righteousness, and that hatred drove him to murder the one person who had been declared righteous.

Nothing has really changed over the years. The world still hates righteousness and it still hunts down and kills those who are righteous. Jesus put it this way:

John 15:18: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you.

19 If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.

20 Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”

Abel was simply the first person to experience this. Since he was righteous, the world hated him. Since he loved the Lord, the world hunted him down and murdered him. If we are righteous then we can expect the world to hate us as well. The world that hated Jesus will never love His followers.

As we all know, Cain did not get away with his scheme. The Lord confronted him about it, just as He confronted Cain's parents in the Garden of Eden:

Genesis 4:9: “And the Lord said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: am I my brother's keeper?”

When Adam sinned and the Lord confronted him, Adam tried to shift the blame to his wife. Cain, however, takes a more direct approach: he just tells a blatant lie (a lie that is tinged with disrespect and thinly-veiled contempt). Unfortunately for Cain, the Lord knows everything. God did not question Cain because He noticed that Abel was missing and wasn't sure what had happened to him. Whenever the Lord asks questions it is for *our* benefit, not His. God knew perfectly well that Cain had killed his brother. This was simply the first step in Cain's judgment.

This does bring up a question, though: why did God talk directly to Cain? Why didn't someone just call the police and have Cain arrested? Why is Cain getting the same treatment that Adam and Eve got in the Garden of Eden?

Well, it's important to note that human government was not instituted by God until *after the Flood*. When Noah and his family finally left the Ark the Lord changed a number of things. One of those things was making mankind responsible for the execution of justice:

Genesis 9:5: “And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

6 Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man.”

This is why governments and the police have the right to hunt down and prosecute criminals. Not only has God given them that right, but He has actually commanded them to exercise it. Notice, though, that these verses appear in Genesis 9, not Genesis 4. There was no justice system in place when Cain was alive. Instead, God apparently handled things personally. This is just one of the many ways in which life was quite different before the Flood. Throughout history God periodically changed the rules, and this is one example of this. (Theologians refer to this as different *dispensations*. That, however, is a topic for another time.)

Cain's attempt to deny any knowledge of what happened to his brother did not fool God. The Lord confronted Cain directly with what he had done:

Genesis 4:10: “And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.”

Nothing that we do is hidden from God; He knows everything and sees everything. People may think that they are “getting away with it”, but they are not. God is simply biding His time until the day of judgment, when all sins that are not covered by the blood of Christ are judged once and for all. No one will get away with anything; all sins that are not forgiven will be brought up and judged. There is no escaping God and there is no hiding from Him.

God did not kill Adam and Eve when they sinned, and He does not kill Cain either. Instead He curses him – just as He had cursed Cain's parents:

Genesis 4:11: “And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her

mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand;
12 When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth."

The curse is very similar to the one that we find in Genesis 3. Since Cain was a farmer, God cursed his livelihood. The ground would no longer yield crops for him. With his profession taken from him he would be a fugitive and a vagabond.

Why didn't God just kill Cain? Well, think of it this way: if God killed us the first time we sinned, how many of us would live long enough to be saved? The Bible tells us that God is longsuffering and merciful. He withholds His final judgment in order to give men a chance to repent:

2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Some people accept this opportunity and repent, while others – like Cain – do not. All Cain does is complain about it:

Genesis 4:13: "And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear.

14 Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me shall slay me."

Notice that Cain shows absolutely no remorse for what he's done. Instead he immediately starts complaining that God isn't being fair! Keep in mind that *Cain just killed his own brother*. Cain expresses no gratitude that God didn't strike Cain dead on the spot (as God later did to others throughout the Old and New Testament). There isn't even any sense of shame! Cain is just a remorseless murderer who lashes out at the very God who showed him mercy.

Some people may wonder why Cain was worried about being killed by other people. After all, aside from his parents, who else was there around to kill him? In order to answer this question we need to realize a couple things.

First of all, when Cain slew Abel the two of them were probably at least a hundred years old. This can be calculated from the fact that the Lord gave Adam and Eve another son (Seth) after Abel was killed, and according to Genesis 5:3 this other son was born when Adam was 130. If we assume that Seth was born shortly after Abel was murdered, then it seems pretty likely that Cain and Abel were *not* teenagers. The brothers could have easily been more than a hundred years old.

Second, Adam and Eve probably had other children in the decades that passed between the birth of Abel and the birth of Seth. These children could have had children of their own, and even grandchildren, long before Cain murdered Abel. Seth was almost certainly *not* Eve's third son. There was enough time for several generations to be born. There could have been dozens of people alive when the murder took place – perhaps more than a hundred, depending on how many children Eve had and how soon her children had children of their own.

To answer the common question "Who did Cain marry?", the answer is that he probably married his sister. It is true that the Mosaic Law forbids this, but the Mosaic Law was not given until thousands of years later. Before the time of Moses siblings were allowed to get married – in fact,

Abraham married his half-sister Sarah.

Why did God change things? Well, it's important to remember that when God created mankind our genetic code was perfect and free from mutations. Under those circumstances inbreeding would not have caused any problems. It was only millennia later, when mutations had crept into our DNA, that inbreeding would cause serious harm. When the situation changed God changed the rules.

As we can see from the passage, Cain – who had no concern whatsoever for his brother's life – was concerned about *his* life. He was afraid that someone might kill him and he wanted God to do something about it. Stop and think about that for a moment! Cain, who killed his brother, *doesn't want other people to kill him*. He demands divine protection *from other murderers*. He apparently believes that it's ok for *him* to go around killing people, but no one should be allowed to kill *him*.

Amazingly, the Lord heard Cain:

Genesis 4:15: “And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.”

The Lord protected Cain by putting a mark upon him. No one knows exactly what that mark was; the passage does not say. (It is also important to note that no one today has somehow inherited the mark of Cain. All of mankind is a descendent of Noah, and Noah descended from Seth, not Cain. There is also no evidence that the mark was something that could be passed down genetically.) Whatever the mark was, it must have been effective because Cain went on to build a city and have children of his own (who, apparently, were as evil as he was).

Cain's death is not recorded so it's not known how long Cain lived. Before the Flood most people lived to be around 900 years old, so Cain may have lived for another 800 years. At some point, however, he died, and had to face the God that he so despised. The judgment of God was delayed, but it was not put off forever.

It's interesting to note that after this conversation Cain went as far away from God as possible:

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

The passage does *not* say that Cain was evicted from the presence of the Lord, or that the Lord drove him off. Cain *chose* to leave God and moved to the land of Nod. There he had children and built himself a city:

Genesis 4:17: “And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.”

It should be noted that this is *not* the famous Enoch who never died; that was another person entirely. It's also interesting that Cain did not take up residence inside a cave; instead he built a *city*. Ancient man did not consist of dumb cavemen! It takes a lot of intelligence to build a city, and the fact that Adam's children were *building cities* should make us sit up and take notice. These people were not cavemen! They were city dwellers and had civilization.

Cain's line did not end with Enoch. He had grandchildren and great-grandchildren, some of whom were quite clever and created some pretty important inventions:

Genesis 4:18: “And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mehujael: and Mehujael begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech.

19 And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

20 And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle.

21 And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.

22 And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.”

As you can see, Cain's children were not dummies. By seven generations after Adam (Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael, Methusael, Lamech, and Lamech's children) mankind had already invented animal husbandry and music, and had entered the brass and iron age (at the same time). They were not scratching out a meager existence in a cave somewhere – they were building a civilization!

As a side-note, it takes intelligence to invent musical instruments – and this was not just *a* musical instrument, but *the first musical instruments ever to exist* in all of history. These were very intelligent people. They were *not* moral people, however, as the chapter goes on to tell us:

Genesis 4:23: “And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt.

24 If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.”

Cain's children were no different from Cain. He had created a line of murders who thought only of themselves. Evil was on the rise in humanity, and this trend would ultimately lead to the Flood.

Genesis 4 is not the last time that Cain is mentioned; Cain and Abel are referred to in the New Testament as well. We have already discussed Hebrews 11:4 and I John 3:11. Another mention can be found in Jude:

Jude 1:11: “Woe unto them! For they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.”

Those who follow their own path instead of God are said to be going in “the way of Cain”. He is forever remembered as one deeply associated with evil. That is a remarkable legacy.

Christ referred to Abel as the first martyr:

Matthew 23:34: “Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city:

35 That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zechariah son of Berechiah, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation.”

The Lord pronounced judgment upon the generation of His day and said that because they

rejected Him they would have to pay for all the righteous blood that was ever shed, starting with the blood of Abel. This sentence was carried out when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD and killed more than a million people.

The book of Hebrews also mentions Abel:

Hebrews 12:24: “And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”

Here Christ's death is contrasted with Abel's. Abel died a righteous death, but his blood only cried out for vengeance. Christ's death was different because He died a death of *atonement* and His blood washes away our sins. The blood of Jesus does indeed speak better things than the blood of Abel.