

“Then Jesus answered and said to them,... ‘You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life;

And These Are They Which Testify of Me

Sermons on Genesis

Approaching God

Cain & Abel

Genesis 4 & 5

With Study Questions

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Preview: Cain and Abel (Genesis 4 & 5)

At the close of Genesis 3, we learn that man has fallen, Eden is closed. In chapter four we see the beginning of civilization. Adam and Eve give birth to Cain and Abel; God has respect for Abel's sacrifice but not Cain's; Cain becomes angry and depressed; God confronts Cain; Cain kills Abel; God curses Cain by cursing the ground he tills and sentencing him to a life as a fugitive and a vagabond, but at the same time grants him protection; We then see the lineage of Cain, which will include the first city, polygamist, rancher, musician, iron & bronze-worker and continued violence; We then see the line of Seth and the continued seed of man's hope, culminating with Noah.

Let us be reminded of the bearings we are to bring to our scope of the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus taught, "**You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me**" (John 5:39). This does not mean that we should emblazon some Christological imposition on every last single sentence. Genesis 5:31 reads, "**So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died.**" We shouldn't read this and extract, "Lamech lived to be seven hundred (a number of perfection) and seventy-seven (extreme perfection), thus signifying the perfection of Jesus. The genealogies, as a whole, are important in establishing the lineage of Christ. But let's not overdo it. Nonetheless, in the story of Cain and Abel, we ought to see something of the character and nature of God as it relates to redemption in Christ.

I. Points of Difficulty

As is our custom, let us deal with a few difficulties in the two chapters before us.

Why Sacrifice?

Why would they be bringing a sacrifice, prior to commands to sacrifice? The concept of the necessity of shedding blood was already before mankind (animals skins—Genesis 3:21). It was likely the oral transmission from Adam to his progeny. The seed that would save mankind was to be foreshadowed from the very beginning.

“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission” (Hebrews 9:22).

Where did Cain get a wife?

In a recent film, the starring actress boasts of her stumping her Sunday School teachers by asking, seemingly, impossible questions like, ‘Where did Cain’s wife come from?’ The answer is quite easy. She was a relative. But is this not incest? Incest would eventually be forbidden by Mosaic law, though it may not have been forbidden from the beginning. But even if it were forbidden, the fall had placed man in a dreadfully sinful position. If I am speeding at 120 miles per hour in a 25 miles per hour zone, I, of necessity, must continue to be in sin until I reduce my speed. Either way, we don’t have any difficulty figuring out from whence Cain’s wife came.

How could people live so old?

As we learned earlier, there may have been a canopy of water surrounding the earth, protecting people from the aging effects of the sun. The theory being, that when the canopy of water emptied at the flood, this sort of longevity ended. Of course, this is a guess. It may also be that the effects of the fall had not yet brought the constitution of man to such a deplorable condition that men would die at younger ages. After all, Adam and Even must have been exceptional specimens. No clear answer is given in the text itself. Suffice it to say, living to 900 violates neither the laws of theology or nature. And trying to adjust the ages by turning the years into months (as some suggest) increases the problem, since men would be fathers by age 6 or younger.

II. Points of Emphasis

Now let us examine the points of emphasis by gliding, as it were, over the surface of the text—remembering that I have asked you to read the material in advance.

Acceptable Sacrifices (4:1-5)

“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” (Genesis 4:1-5)

Why was Abel’s sacrifice respected and not Cain’s? The first hint lies in the passage itself.

“And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, ⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering” (Genesis 4:4,5).

It wasn’t merely the offering, but the person, that God either respects or disrespects. It wasn’t, as some suppose, the physical make-up of the sacrifice—Abel bringing animals and Cain bringing vegetation. Sacrifices didn’t, of necessity, have to be blood sacrifices on all occasions.

“When anyone offers a grain offering to the LORD, his offering shall be of fine flour. And he shall pour oil on it, and put frankincense on it” (Leviticus 2:1)

New Testament writers give us a deeper glimpse. Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice by faith.

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous” (Hebrews 11:4).

Abel’s outward excellence gave witness of his inward excellence. And, as we know, God looks at the inward.

“For *the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).*

Does this mean that God doesn’t care what we do outwardly, just as long as our heart is in the right place? Is there any substance to the maxim, “It’s now how you worship but who your worship?” On the contrary, a man’s heart, being in the right place, is what changes his outward behavior. Cain’s sin was on his hand and forehead. This is quickly observed by the ensuing conversation.

Cain’s Anger (4:6-8)

“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” (Genesis 4:6-8).

Reasoning With Cain

Once again, similar to Adam, God approaches the sinful man and not vice-versa. God’s approach to man is based upon reason.

“Come now, and let us reason together,’ Says the LORD, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson, They shall be as wool.¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient,...” (Isaiah 1:18,19).

God does not approach man as an unreasonable despot, but the way a loving parent might reason with wayward offspring.

Why Anger?

God gives Cain wise counsel. First he asks Cain why he’s angry? Surely there is such a thing as righteous anger. Such was not the case with Cain. John teaches us,

“...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. ¹³ Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you” (1 John 3:12,13).

Although there would be differences in their outward behavior, the defining disposition between Cain and Abel, at its root, was inward. Cain’s primary sin, whether or not he was willing to examine it or not, was offering a sacrifice unaccompanied by a heart which saw its need for the sacrifice. Abel’s sacrifice was one of faith. Faith in what? Faith in that thing for which the sacrifice stood—a Messiah who would deliver him from his sin. The genuine faith of Abel angered Cain.

Catering to Sin

God then warns Cain as to where entertaining and catering to sin will lead. It is crouching at the door and its desire is for you. This is likely a reference to the tragic effects of sin. As James conveys,

“Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death” (James 1:15).

There comes a point when sin overwhelms an individual. One who continually resists God, His mercy and His counsel, will eventually be turned over to a fully reprobate (morally unprincipled and godless) condition (see Romans 1:18-32).

Church Split

We see here the first example of a church split—keeping in mind that they were both involved in the ecclesiastical duties of making sacrifices. Jude warns us of the continued threat of this in the church. He writes of certain men who have crept into the church. He calls them, **“dreamers (who) defile the flesh, reject authority, and speak evil of dignitaries...Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain” (Jude 8,11).**

As we will see in a moment, Cain was arrogant. He did not acknowledge the defiled nature of his own flesh, nor did he have respect for the authority of God. We are sinners who must throw ourselves upon the mercy of a gracious God who grants us wisdom, by His word, and forgiveness. Cain would bull his neck, and his sin would escalate to murder.

Cain’s Curse (4:9-12)

“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” (Genesis 4:9-12).

The Blood of Abel—the Blood of Jesus

God once again approaches Cain, this time regarding Abel’s death. Cain responds with lies and arrogance. **“I do not know. *Am I* my brother’s keeper” (Genesis 4:9).** The blood of Abel has become a catch-phrase for justice. God responds to Cain’s lies, **“The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (Genesis 4:10).**

Later, Jesus, speaking to the scribes and Pharisees, brings up the blood of Abel,

“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” (Matthew 23:34-36).

God, being a just God, must punish sin. The people to whom Jesus spoke had openly rejected, and would crucify, the promised Messiah. On them, therefore, would fall the righteous blood of all, starting with Abel, i.e. justice. The author of Hebrews compares the blood of Abel with another, however. He compares it...

“...to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than *that of Abel*” (Hebrews 12:24).

In what respect does the blood of Jesus speak better things than that of Abel? The blood of Abel calls for justice and vengeance. The blood of Christ meets the demands of God’s justice. In short, those who reject the person and work of Christ, choose justice, judgment and death. Those who embrace the Savior—who call on His name—choose mercy and life.

The Verdict (4:13-16)

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” (Genesis 4:13-16).

God Holds Back

Instead of turning to Christ, Cain charges God with being too harsh. **“My punishment *is* greater than I can bear” (Genesis 4:13).** For the hard of heart, justice simply intensifies their bitterness.

And great hail from heaven fell upon men, each hailstone about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great” (Revelation 16:21).

No explanation is given as to why God chose to protect Cain. Some believe it was simply so the human race would continue, but that hardly seems sufficient. As we read the story, our own hearts might cry out for justice. But, similar to King David, God chooses to curse Cain to a lesser degree. It would be a curse nonetheless.

The Mark/Out of God’s Presence

Not much can be said about the mark on Cain, other than that it would be noticeable to others. This section ends with the phrase, “**Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD.**” Of course, God is omnipresent, so this must simply mean that Cain would live his life as if there were no God.

Primary

The primary message contained in these verses revolve around God’s justice and man’s only hope. Faithlessness and bitter rejection results in condemnation. But one who comes to God, in faith, will avoid the blood of Abel, by the blood of Christ.

The Line of Cain (4:17-22)

Now we turn to the progeny of Cain.

“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 Jubal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. 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” (Genesis 4:17-22).

The line of Cain includes the first mentioned city, polygamist, rancher, musician, iron & bronze-worker. We learn that even the ungodly can be

positively productive in some respects. But the lineage would have its problems.

Song of the Sword (4:23,24)

“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” (Genesis 4:23,24).

Volumes cannot be extracted from this first poem in the Bible, except the awareness that violence continued and polygamy began in the line of Cain. Cain himself became a bit of a folk hero. Lamech assumes the mercy and protection extended to Cain would also be extended to him. This is a false assumption. Even in his own song, he is not dependent God, but himself.

Seth (4:25-5:32)

“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.

Chapter four ends with a reference to the birth of Seth. This is expounded upon in chapter five. One thing, though, is notable at the end of chapter four. The birth of Seth (taking Abel's place) and the birth of his son Enosh is accompanied by the statement, **“Then men began to call on the name of the Lord.”** This is a phrase which often designates public worship. Through Seth we will see the succession of the church.

The Image of Seth (5:1-3)

“This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God.² He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created.³ And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a *son* in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

It is of interest to note that Seth is born after the image of Adam, the fallen man. There is nothing special about Seth in terms of his nature. He is a sinner

like all others. But, by the grace of God, he is the one through whom the faithful line, and the giver of faith, will come.

The Line of Seth (5:4-32)

“After he begot Seth, the days of Adam were eight hundred years; and he had sons and daughters. ⁵ So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died. ⁶ Seth lived one hundred and five years, and begot Enosh. ⁷ After he begot Enosh, Seth lived eight hundred and seven years, and had sons and daughters. ⁸ So all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years; and he died. ⁹ Enosh lived ninety years, and begot Cainan. ¹⁰ After he begot Cainan, Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years, and had sons and daughters. ¹¹ So all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years; and he died. ¹² Cainan lived seventy years, and begot Mahalalel. ¹³ After he begot Mahalalel, Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years, and had sons and daughters. ¹⁴ So all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died. ¹⁵ Mahalalel lived sixty-five years, and begot Jared. ¹⁶ After he begot Jared, Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years, and had sons and daughters. ¹⁷ So all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years; and he died. ¹⁸ Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years, and begot Enoch. ¹⁹ After he begot Enoch, Jared lived eight hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²⁰ So all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years; and he died. ²¹ Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. ²² After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. ²³ So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. ²⁵ Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years, and begot Lamech. ²⁶ After he begot Lamech, Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years, and had sons and daughters. ²⁷ So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years; and he died. ²⁸ Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. ²⁹ And he called his name Noah, saying, “This *one* will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed.” ³⁰ After he begot Noah, Lamech lived five hundred and ninety-five years, and had sons and daughters. ³¹ So all the days of Lamech were seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and he died. ³² And Noah was five hundred years old, and Noah begot Shem, Ham, and Japheth” (Genesis 5:4-32).

Enoch

We see the recurring theme of ages when having children, who the children were and age of death (a repetitive rebuttal to the line of the serpent—**“You will not surely die” [Genesis 3:4]**). But two individuals are of special note as we conclude. The comments deviate when it comes to Enoch. Instead of, “And he died,” it is said of Enoch that he “walked with God.” Singular was this, (excepting Elijah) and very likely the foreshadow of a resurrection. Early did mankind learn that death need not be inevitable. There is a very famous, and often quoted, passage in the New Testament. The individual of whom this passage speaks is Enoch.

“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God. ⁶ But without faith *it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:5,6).*

Again, it was not Enoch’s works, but faith which saved him.

Noah

And finally we see the line of Seth culminates with Noah. More on him will be said later. But we do learn this. Curses (though not in totality) are visited upon the progeny of the evil and blessings (though peppered with chastisement) are visited upon the progeny of the godly. Cain’s individual sin would result in a legacy of ungodliness. Seth’s faithfulness would produce righteousness.

Primary

So where does the story of Cain and Abel lead us, in a sentence or two? We see here is God being faithful to preserve a lineage, a seed, which would produce the Savior He had promised. We see that God is a just God who does not ignore, but must punish, the sins of men. But He is a gracious God who, though not a respecter of persons (Romans 2:11), will respect those who come to Him by way of sincere faith in Christ.

Questions for Study

1. Why would Cain and Abel offer sacrifices when we don't see the command to do that (yet) in the Scriptures?
2. From where did Cain's wife come?
3. How could people have lived so old?
4. Why was Abel's sacrifice accepted, but not Cain's?
5. Does God looking at the "inward" mean He doesn't care what we do outwardly?
6. Why was Cain angry and murderous?
7. What does the phrase, "Sin is at the door. And its desire is for you" mean?
8. What was the bottom-line difference between the sacrifice of Cain and Abel?
9. What happens if we continue to cater to, and entertain a sinful disposition?
10. Compare the blood of Abel to the blood of Jesus.
11. What does it mean that Cain went out from the presence of the Lord?
12. Compare the lineage of Cain to that of Seth.
13. Why is it mentioned that Seth was born in the image of Adam?
14. Explain the primary redemptive message of these chapters.