

# CAIN AND ABEL

## INTRODUCTION

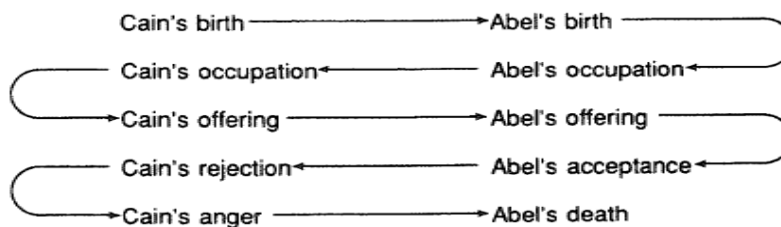
- The primary purpose of Genesis 4 is to demonstrate the spread of sin and death into the first family
- It records the first act of worship in human history and the first murder
- The story of Cain and Abel obviously vividly illustrates man’s depraved condition and the effects of the fall upon them
- “The subject of chapter 4 is the spread of godless society. Here is man in rebellion against God—man who did not obey and who destroyed the godly and denied his responsibility and culpability for it.”<sup>1</sup>
- There are many parallels between the account of the Fall in chapter 3 and the story of Cain and Abel
- Adam’s sin now becomes the model for human sinfulness...as evidenced by the similarities between Adam’s Fall and Cain’s sin against Abel

<u>Genesis 3</u>	<u>Genesis 4</u>
Where are you? <a href="#">3:9</a>	Where is Abel your brother? <a href="#">4:9</a>
What is this you have done? <a href="#">3:13</a>	What have you done? <a href="#">4:10</a>
Cursed is the ground for your sake <a href="#">3:17</a>	You are cursed from the earth <a href="#">4:11</a>
Drove out the man <a href="#">3:24</a>	You have driven me out...from the...ground <a href="#">4:14</a>
East of Eden <a href="#">3:24</a>	East of Eden <a href="#">4:16</a>

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- The similarities between these two chapters shows that the events of Cain and Abel are an extension of the previous chapter
- This demonstrates that humanity is now deeply entrenched in the effects of Adam’s sin, a reality that no man can escape from without a divine remedy
- “Cain and Abel provide us with archetypal representations of two kinds of people in a setting of worship.”<sup>3</sup>
- The structure of Genesis 4:1-8:

Chart 8. **Literary Development of the Cain and Abel Story**



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<sup>1</sup> Ross, A. P. (1985). [Genesis](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 33). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> [https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/does-genesis-3-teach-fall-of-man/?utm\\_source=facebook-aig&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=facebook-aig](https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/does-genesis-3-teach-fall-of-man/?utm_source=facebook-aig&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=facebook-aig)

<sup>3</sup> Allen Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 153.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

- As with Adam and Eve, we must take Cain and Abel as actual, real, historical figures
- Not only does Moses treat them as historical characters in Genesis so too does the New Testament as it frequently refers to them

**Hebrews 11:4** ~ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

**Hebrews 12:24** ~ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

**1 John 3:12** ~ not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother's were righteous.

**Jude 11** ~ Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.

## THE BIRTHS OF CAIN AND ABEL

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**Genesis 4:1-2** ~ Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten a manchild with the help of the LORD." 2 Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

- "had relations" = literally "knew" (*yada*), a euphemism for sexual intercourse
- Presumably Cain was the firstborn child of Adam and Eve, with Adam as the second child
- We know that they had many more children...Genesis 5:4 indicates that they had "other sons and daughters"
- "Jewish tradition claims that Adam and Eve bore some 60 children together. There is no reason to doubt such prolific reproduction. After all, the initial command from the Creator included the imperative to 'multiply.' It is likely they had many more than that, given their physical stamina, beauty, health, and longevity."<sup>5</sup>
- Cain was likely born soon after the expulsion from the Garden...and Abel likely a year later
- Some have suggested that the sons were twins, but there is nothing in the text to necessarily support that view
- The events described in verse 3 probably occurred when Cain and Abel were both adults, more than a century after the creation
- We think this because, Eve gave birth to Seth when she and Adam were 130 years old

**Genesis 5:3** ~ When Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, he became the father of a son in his own likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth.

- Since Eve viewed Seth as a replacement for Abel and since Seth was likely their next son after Abel's death, it is likely that Cain and Abel were in their late-120s at the time of Abel's death (129 years after Adam and Eve left the garden?)

**Genesis 4:25** ~ Adam had relations with his wife again; and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, "God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him."

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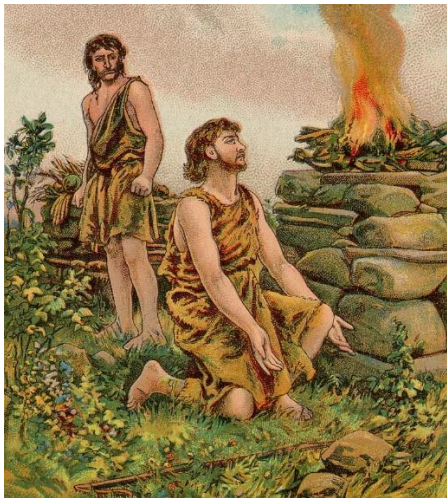
<sup>5</sup> Henry Morris, *The Book of Beginnings*, 195.

- Because of the expectation of a Redeemer who would crush the head of Satan (Gen 3:15), Eve apparently prematurely thought that Cain was the fulfillment of that promise
- This is implied in her response to his birth “I have gotten a man from the Lord” (v. 1)...this could be literally rendered “I have gotten a man, the Lord”
- Perhaps Eve saw the birth of Cain as part of the fulfillment of the promise of God that her seed would crush the serpent's head
- Eve may have thought her first son would be the promised Messiah and put her hope in him
- Whether she believed he was the deliverer promised in Genesis 3:15 or not, her words at least show that she believed in God’s promise of a Redeemer
- Other than their births, we know nothing of the brothers’ lives until that fateful day of the two sacrifices except that “Abel was a keeper of flocks, but Cain was a tiller of the ground” (v. 2)
- There is nothing wrong with either occupation; in fact, both were respectable and both were necessary for life
- However, there is a slightly ominous note in the contrast of their occupations in that these vocational descriptions possibly give further insight into their hearts
- Cain’s rebellious nature is correlated to him tilling the ground (cf. the curse in Gen 3:23) and Abel’s vocation lined up with man’s original purpose, to exercise dominion over creation (cf. the creation mandate in Gen 1:28)

## THE OFFERINGS OF CAIN AND ABEL

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**Genesis 4:3-5a** ~ So it came about in the course of time that Cain brought an offering to the LORD of the fruit of the ground. 4 Abel, on his part also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and for his offering; 5 but for Cain and for his offering He had no regard.”



- Cain brought to the Lord the fruit of the ground, but Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions
- Although unrecorded in Scripture, God must have told them the kind of sacrifice they were to offer
- God accepted (or “regarded/favored”) Abel’s offering, but did not accept Cain’s offering
- Many different explanations have been offered for why God received Abel’s sacrifice but not Cain’s
- Although we cannot know for sure which reason best explains why God respected Abel’s offering and not Cain’s, it may be a combination of the following:

1. In killing animals to clothe Adam and Eve’s sin ([Genesis 3:21](#)), God had set forth a pattern that there were to be blood sacrifices offered to him as sin offerings. Although not recorded in Scripture, God likely instructed Adam (and then Adam would have instructed his sons) that an animal needed to be sacrificed to God to cover sin. Cain, knowing this, still decided to offer what he wanted, not what God demanded. We’ll call this the “**type of sacrifice**” position. The strength of this argument is that it is appealing to the only other previous mention of a sacrifice, done by God himself, as a sin covering, and that it acknowledges the importance of blood sacrifices mentioned elsewhere in Scripture ([Hebrews 9:22](#)). The weakness is that there is no mention that this was a sin offering in the passage, and there were many thanksgiving sacrifices later in Leviticus which were grain, not blood, offerings.

2. The second, which we'll call the "**quality of the sacrifice**" position, analyzes the text and notices that it specifically mentions that Abel brought the firstborn animals from his flock and also their fat portions while all it says of Cain was that he brought the fruit of the ground. Perhaps Cain had just thrown together his sacrifice, or maybe deliberately offered the stunted and blighted portions of his crops to the Lord. This argument is seemingly bolstered by *Hebrews 11:4*, which called Abel's sacrifice a "more excellent sacrifice" that could be referring to quality. We know from later Scripture (*Leviticus 1:3, 10; Malachi 1:8*) that God did not respect just any animal sacrifice: it needed to be an unblemished animal. He also required grain offerings to be done in certain ways (*Leviticus 2:1-7*) and that no leaven was to be mixed in with the grain (*Leviticus 2:11*). The weakness with this argument is that we are not directly told that Cain's offering was of poor quality or had leaven in it, or even if rules similar to the Levitical ones (given over 2,000 years later) would have been in place at the time of *Genesis 4*.
3. The third position we'll call the "**heart behind the sacrifice.**" This position looks at statements God made to Cain afterwards, as well as some later scriptural passages. In *Genesis 4:7*, God asks Cain "If you do well, will you not be accepted?" The clear implication is that Cain had not done well but had unrepentant sin when he offered the sacrifice. Perhaps Cain had an unrepentant heart, and God may have rejected the sacrifice because of Cain's defiant attitude. *1 John 3:11-12 (NKJV)* may support this position: "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." This passage tells us that Cain's works were evil before he murdered Abel. And these "evil works" could refer to Cain's offering itself. This would imply that Cain did, in fact, violate instructions God had given (but that aren't listed in Genesis) for what type or quality of offerings to give. The weakness behind this position is that we only learn of Cain's anger and "evil works" after God had rejected his offering. That rejection may have been what sparked the evil works, not the sacrifice itself.<sup>6</sup>

- The reason God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's is likely a combination of all those possibilities
- Ultimately, the reason has to do with the presence of faith in God and His Word on Abel's part and the lack of faith in God and His Word on Cain's part
- Abel went out of his way to please the Lord with his offering...literally "He brought the fattest of the firstlings of his flock" (v. 4)
- Thus, whereas Abel went out of his way to give the Lord his best, Cain simply discharged a duty

**Hebrews 11:4** ~ By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained the testimony that he was righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.

- Abel offered "a better sacrifice" because it was offered in faith
- The key difference between Cain and Abel's sacrifice is that Cain's was made in disobedient unbelief; Abel's was made in obedient faith
- It is quite clear that the offering was to be a substitutionary atonement through an animal sacrifice
- The horrific scene where God killed the first animals to make clothes for Adam and Eve would have been idelibly imprinted on their hearts
- "Given the later institution of the 'Day of Atonement,' it is not at all presumptuous to expect God to demand that the human population observe some sort of formal sacrifice of animals in perpetuity until the 'Lamb of God' finally came in future history...Surely it does not do injustice to the brief information in Genesis 4 to infer that the sacrifice which preceded the judgment of Cain would have been a 'regular' practice – probably an annual affair – and may well have been at the gate of the Garden under the watchful eyes of the Cherubim and the presence of the pre-incarnate Person of the Creator Himself."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-characters/cain-and-abel/>

<sup>7</sup> Morris, *Book of Beginnings*, 196.

- Thus, it is reasonable to infer that Cain’s act of offering “the fruit of the ground” was a sudden departure from years of accepted and well-known practice of offering an animal sacrifice
- There are some important implications for us
  - True faith always takes God at His Word
  - Obedience does not produce faith...rather true faith manifests itself in obedience
  - Faith teaches us to approach God in worship the way He prescribes, not in conscious disobedience to His authority
- For this reason, “through faith, though he is dead, [Abel] still speaks” (v. 4)
- Abel’s life of faith is as relevant today as it was 6000 years ago in that Abel is still speaking by his example
- Even death does not extinguish his testimony; dead men do still speak to those who will listen

**Genesis 4:5b-7** ~ “...So Cain became very angry and his countenance fell. 6 Then the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? 7 “If you do well, will not your countenance be lifted up? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

- Cain’s lack of faith shows up in his jealous, angry response to God’s rejection of his offering of fruit
- Rather than being concerned about remedying the situation and repenting of his sin, he became gripped with anger and rage such that his entire body language betrayed his resentment
- The Hebrew words here paint a picture of extreme anger...he literally lost it!
- God’s merciful response demonstrates again that it is God who seeks out the sinner and initiates the desire to restore the relationship
- God’s response to Cain invited him to respond with brokenness and contrition over his sin
- The Lord gently confronted Cain and reminded him that, if he did what was expected by His Creator, he would be accepted
- The kind and gracious prodding of the Lord should have brought Cain around to his senses to the reminder of God’s constant care for him
- “What a marvelous exhibition of divine patience and grace!...With intimate tenderness and concern the Lord encouraged Cain to assess himself.”<sup>8</sup>
- God’s response to Cain also implies that he did not “do well” in that, instead of mastering his sin, he became mastered by it
- The word picture here is that of a wild animal crouching at the door, waiting to attack the one who opens it
- This is a warning that sin was about to overwhelm Cain
- Cain was so angry that he could not be talked out of his sin...even by God
- This is a graphic reminder of the power of sin, which constantly looks for ways to overpower sinners
- The Bible provides its own commentary on Cain’s rebellious heart

**1 John 3:11-12** ~ For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another; 12 not as Cain, who was of the evil one and slew his brother. And for what reason did he slay him? Because his deeds were evil, and his brother’s were righteous.

**Jude 11** ~ Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.


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<sup>8</sup> John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison*, 99.

- From these NT statements, it becomes very clear that Cain was not a believer, but is a prototypical example of a rebellious, wicked sinner who loved “darkness rather than light” (John 3:19)
- He was “of the evil one,” a child of Satan
- “the way of Cain” is a description of the character and conduct of false teachers who refuse to accept God’s instructions and instead openly rebel against His revealed will...they are lawless men

## THE MURDER OF ABEL AND THE CURSE ON CAIN

**Genesis 4:8-12** ~ Cain told Abel his brother. And it came about 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?” And he said, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” 10 He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to Me from the ground. 11 Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. 12 When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.”

- This is the first recorded murder in human history
  - “Cain told Abel his brother” – Scripture does not record what Cain said, but when the opportunity presented itself Cain killed his brother
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- Abel’s death becomes the prototype of all murders
  - Those who murder demonstrate that they are complicit in Satan’s schemes (John 8:44)
- Some translation of v. 8 say that, “Cain said to his brother Abel, ‘Let’s go out to the field.’” (HCSB)
  - However the murder played out, the fact that Cain could casually talk with his brother whom he was about to kill shows how callous Cain had become
  - This demonstrates that this is not sudden rage, but premeditated and calculated murder
- Once again, God initiated the conversation with Cain to give him a chance to confess his sin and repent (v. 9)...He sought a confession from Cain
  - But Cain’s indifference to God and His commands is further evident in his flippant and cavalier response: “Am I my brother’s keeper?”...he arrogantly claimed that he was not responsible for his brother’s safety
  - This shows how quickly the human heart can harden itself in sin: Not only was Cain guilty of disobeying God’s instructions regarding the sacrifice (sin #1) and killing his brother (sin #2), he was also guilty of lying about his brother’s location (sin #3)
  - Sin had moved from lying at the “door” of Cain’s heart into a hostile takeover of his mind and will
- There is likely a play on words in his statement in that Abel was a “keeper” of the flock
  - “There is a grain of truth in this brazen lie, despite the surly response Cain offers to the God who created him. While no one is the absolute “keeper” of others in that we are not responsible for everyone’s safety when we are not present, every man is his brother’s keeper in that we are not to commit violent acts against them or allow others to do so if we can prevent it. This sort of “keeping” is something God rightfully demands of everyone, on the grounds of both justice and love. But Cain’s reply indicates a total lack of any kind of feeling for another human being—not to mention the absence of brotherly love—and the overriding presence of the kind of selfishness which kills affection and gives rise to hatred.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gotquestions.org/brothers-keeper.html>

- Like all murderers, Cain thought he had successfully concealed his deed
- But God’s response to Cain (v. 10) shows that He was well aware of Abel’s murder...Cain did not hide his murderous actions
- Notice the phrase in v. 10 ~ your brother’s blood is crying **to Me** from the ground
- If Cain’s sacrificial offering was supposed to be a blood offering, then in a sadly ironic way, Cain, who did not offer a blood sacrifice to God, has now spilled innocent blood on the ground which condemns him
- This reminds us that no one ever gets away with their sin because the sovereign omniscience of God sees and knows all

**Numbers 32:23** ~ But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

**Psalms 139:2-4** ~ You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. 3 You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. 4 Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all.

**Hebrews 4:12-13** ~ For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do.

- God’s response moves instantly from accusation to judgment as it becomes clear there will be no confession forthcoming (vv. 11-12)
- Cain was, thus, cursed in two ways:
  1. The ground he worked would yield little produce – thus, for Cain the ground was doubly cursed, a severe punishment for one whose vocation was to toil in the field
  2. He would be “a vagrant and a wanderer” (a hendiadys = “a wandering fugitive”) – he would move from one place to another, possibly because of his difficulty in getting a decent yield from the soil

## THE PROTECTION OF CAIN

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**Genesis 4:13-15** ~ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is too great to bear! 14 Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.” 15 So the LORD said to him, “Therefore whoever kills Cain, vengeance will be taken on him sevenfold.” And the LORD appointed a sign for Cain, so that no one finding him would slay him.

- Cain lamented God’s curse upon him and grieved its consequences, feeling that the punishment was too much to handle
- He feared that he would be killed by others...who was Cain afraid of? → he was afraid of his own brothers, sisters, nephews, and nieces who were already born and would be capable of seeking revenge
- This shows that the population of the earth had largely increased
- Although Genesis does not specifically mention Adam and Eve having any children between Abel and Seth, it is unlikely that the two most perfect human beings in the history of the world, Adam and Eve, would not have any children over several decades
- Adam and Eve had many children after Seth (see Gen 5:4), so it is not hard to imagine that they would have also had other children between Abel and Seth
- Also, the fact that Cain had a wife (see Gen 4:17) is a further evidence that Adam and Eve had other children after Cain and Abel, but before Seth
- Unfortunately, though Cain had regret, he did not demonstrate true repentance

- As such, he illustrates many who lament the consequences of their sinful choices, but fail to truly repent of their offense against a holy God
- “Regret may come (and usually does), but regret is not the same as repentance. Regret senses the consequences to come and wants to avoid them. Repentance abhors the deed and longs to correct it. Regret may wish that the event had not transpired and will usually embrace an excuse for the sin. Repentance recognizes the violation of righteousness and seeks the face of the One who can forgive. Cain had a lot of regret, but not repentance.”<sup>10</sup>

**2 Corinthians 7:10** ~ For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

- In His mercy and common grace, God granted Cain divine protection from those who might seek to exact retribution
- This shows that God has reserved retribution solely for Himself as well as His hatred of those who seek to exact personal vengeance

**Romans 12:17, 19** ~ Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men...19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

- What was the mark of Cain? → we are not specifically told, but it was some mark of God’s divine protection assuring that he was not to be killed...it also was a perpetual reminder of his shame
- The precise nature of the mark is not the focus of the passage
- Unfortunately, some have wrongly believed that God changed the color of Cain’s skin to black in order to identify him
- Since Cain also received a curse, many falsely believed that people of dark skin were cursed
- Sadly, many have used this as justification for the African slave trade and discrimination against people with black/dark skin
- This interpretation is completely unbiblical and should never be used as an excuse for racism

## CONCLUSION

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- The legacies of Cain and Abel could hardly be any more different: Abel is honored for his faith, and Cain is used as an object lesson in hate
- Cain is shown to be a man without faith, a man in rebellion against God
- However, Abel is held up as the first martyr for following God

**Matthew 23:35** ~ so that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.

- Abel’s blood is also compared with the infinitely greater blood of Christ, who in his incarnation suffered death at the hands of angry sinners

**Hebrews 12:24** ~ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

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<sup>10</sup> Morris, *Book of Beginnings*, 200.