

Genesis Four

The Births of Cain and Abel

1 And Adam knew¹ Eve his wife, and she conceived, and gave birth to Cain,² and said, I have acquired a man with Yahweh.³ ²And she again give birth to his brother Abel.⁴ And Abel was shepherding a flock, but Cain was working⁵ the soil.

The Failure of Cain

3 And it happened there was the completion of some days⁶ and Cain brought of the fruit of the soil for offering to Yahweh. ⁴And Abel also brought the fat from the firstborn of his flock.⁷ And Yahweh looked favorably on Abel, and on his offering; ⁵and on Cain, and on his offering, he did not look favorably.⁸ And Cain was very angry, and his face fell.⁹ ⁶And Yahweh said to Cain, Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷If you do well,¹⁰ will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door; its desire is for you, and you must rule it. ¹¹

The Murder of Abel

8 And Cain spoke to Abel his brother,¹² and it happened when they were in the field, that Cain attacked Abel his brother, and murdered him. ⁹And Yahweh said to Cain, Where is Abel your brother? And he said, I do not know. Am I my brother's guardian?¹³

Yahweh's Judgment of Cain

10 And he said, What have you done?¹⁴ The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.¹⁵ ¹²When you cultivate the ground, it will not continue to yield its strength for you; you will be restless¹⁶ and wander on the earth.¹⁷

Yahweh's Preservation of Cain

13 And Cain said to Yahweh, My punishment is more than I can bear. ¹⁴Behold, you have driven me today from the face of the land, and I will be hidden from your face;¹⁸ and behold, I will be restless and wander on the earth;¹⁹ and it will happen, that any one who finds me will kill me.²⁰ ¹⁵And Yahweh said to him, Therefore, whoever

kills Cain, it shall be revenged seven-fold.²¹ And Yahweh put a mark on Cain,²² so that any finding him would not strike him. ¹⁶And Cain went out from the presence of Yahweh,²³ and dwelt in the land of Nod,²⁴ to the east of Eden.

The Descendants of Cain

The Birth of Enoch

17 And Cain knew his wife,²⁵ and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch²⁶. And he built a city; and he called the name of the city after the name of his son Enoch.²⁷

The Line of Enoch

18²⁸ And to Enoch²⁹ was born Irad³⁰; and Irad begot Mechujael³¹; and Mechujael begot Methushael³²; and Methushael begot Lemech.³³ ¹⁹And Lemech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the second, Zillah.³⁴ ²⁰And Adah bore Jubal³⁵; he was the father³⁶ of those who dwell in tents, and breed cattle.³⁷ ²¹And his brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of those who handle the harp and pipe. ²²And Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain,³⁸ the forger of every kind of tool of brass and iron. And the sister of Tubal-Cain was Na'amah.³⁹

The Logic of Lemech

23 And Lemech said to his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice,⁴⁰ You wives of Lemech, listen to my speech. For I have killed a man for bruising me, and a young lad for striking me. ²⁴If Cain shall be avenged seven-fold; Lemech seventy and seven fold.⁴¹

The Birth and Line of Seth

25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son, and called his name Seth⁴², for she said, Elohim has appointed for me another seed instead of Abel, because Cain has slain him. ²⁶And regarding Seth, to him also was born a son; and he called his name Enosh.⁴³ Then men⁴⁴ began to call on the name Yahweh.

End Notes

- 1 The Hebrews used the word *knew* (יָדַע) as a euphemism for having sexual relations.
- 2 At a later date the root of the name Cain (קַיִן) was associated with metal work, and was the word for *spear*. That cannot be its meaning here, and most believe that it is related by analogy to the verb meaning *to procure, acquire, get* (קָנָה), which is the verb Eve used in this verse.
- 3 Eve recognized that Yahweh was the ultimate cause of her having Cain.
- 4 Abel (הֶבֶל) is from an uncertain root. Many speculate the meaning, but such speculation is fruitless.
Of more interest is the nature of the statement. The brothers are adults, which indicates that there was a long span of time between this statement and the next. See the next two notes.
- 5 The two qal participles, *shepherding* (רָעָה) and *working* (עָבַד), indicate that these were their regular lines of work, hence they were adults. Participles in Hebrew often name the activity, not so much as a verb, but as a statement of fact. For that reason some translate the two participles *shepherd* and *farmer*. Nevertheless, each participle describes activity, which may include, but is not limited to, profession. Their professional activity established, the brother's proceeded to bring offerings to the Lord from the fruit of their labor.
- 6 How long it took until *the completion of some days* is unknown. The brothers were adults by this time, and responsible for their own relationship to Yahweh. Neither appeared to have yet taken wives, nor had children. If one looks at the list in Genesis 5, it appears that men lived a good number of years before starting a family. See the note at Genesis 5:3 on the antediluvian extended lifetimes.
- 7 Abel brought the very best (*fat of the firstborn*) from his flock.
- 8 No agreement among interpreters exists concerning why one offering was accepted and the other rejected. A common view is that it was the nature of the offering itself that was objectionable. According to this view, only a blood sacrifice was acceptable to God, which Abel offered but Cain did not. The problem with this approach is that later, under the Mosaic code, offerings of land produce were also acceptable.
Furthermore, it is always a danger when reading a later idea, the sin offering as described in the Law of Moses, to an earlier period. Nowhere at this earlier time do we find a description of what was and what was not an acceptable offering. Indeed, we must ask, how did the brothers know that *any offering* to God was required?
The usual answer to this is that God had, off the record, explained to them what an offering was and what was acceptable to be sacrificed. However, such is not recorded, and to build a doctrine on silence is always dangerous.
It is much more likely that it was the attitude and actions of Cain that caused his offering to be rejected, whereas Abel was a man of good character. Note that the text says God did not look favorably “on Cain and on his offering.” It is clearly a character issue. The failure of Cain is soon to be expressed in his murder of his younger brother. See 1 John 3:12.
- 9 The idiom *and his face fell* (וַיִּפְּלוּ פָנָיו) indicates a look of intense anger (חָרָה). Though it would not have been so termed at the time, this was the first instance of a *work of the flesh* (Galatians 5:18-21) in the Hebrew Scriptures.
- 10 The issue at this point is *not doing well* rather than an explicit act of sin.
- 11 Sin lies at Cain's door in the sense that it is ready to enter the room, that is, Cain is tending toward sin. Sin is then personified, indicating it desires to control Cain, but Cain must rule it, that is, control it rather than its controlling him. Sin is a specific kind of wrong-doing and Paul is explicit in stating that no sin was imputed after Adam until the law of Moses came to be. Hence, the word often translated *sin* sometimes carries a meaning that differs from the New Testament word. Note that no method for overcoming the wrong act is indicated. There is no grace provision here.
- 12 Some ancient versions (Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Latin Vulgate, Syriac Version) insert “Let us go out to the field.” However, the Hebrew text does not, and there is no actual manuscript evidence that it should be included. To suppose that Cain invited his brother to go out the field is not unreasonable, but it is not the only possibility. No one knows exactly what Cain said.
- 13 Usually translated *keeper*. The typical approach to this question by Cain is in error. It is often thought that the answer should be, “Yes, you are your brother's keeper.” However, the Hebrew word for *keeper, shamar* (שָׁמַר), means *to guard, imprison*. Cain was not his brother's guardian in the original sense of the word.

End Notes

- 14 A rhetorical question, followed by a statement of fact that was intended to show that Yahweh knew exactly what Cain had done.
- 15 It appears that God made it impossible for Cain to continue getting produce from the ground. He could no longer be a farmer. See verse 12.
- 16 A qal participle from a root (נִדַּד) meaning *to quiver, wave, waver, tremble* (BDB).
- 17 Since Cain's livelihood was taken from him, he would become a wanderer. The God-given home which he had enjoyed was no longer available to him.
- 18 This was worse punishment than the modern man can understand. God's relationship to people at this time was geographical in nature. It was Yahweh's intent that he would meet with people in a particular location, *the face of the land*. Hence Cain's statement, "I will be hidden from your face," indicating that his wandering would take him away from where Yahweh was providing sustenance.
- 19 It's clear that this event took place many years after Adam and Eve had sired many sons and daughters. The earth was being populated rapidly, to the point that within the immediate locale, Cain would have found no place to dwell. He would have to travel from where his immediate family resided.
- 20 Is Cain's final complaint well-taken? It is likely that, being a murderer, many might think, with justification, that he was too dangerous to be allowed to live.
- 21 At this point in time the death penalty was not available because God had not implemented a legal system, which was soon to change (Genesis 9:6).
- God's punishment for retribution against Cain was seven-fold, that is, seven times worse than the death of one individual, perhaps saying that the person who killed Cain would die at God's hand, along with those near him, his family.
- 22 Since the nature of the mark is not given, we will not speculate as to what it was. Whatever it was, it could be understood who saw it that Cain was not to be killed. The word *mark* (אֵימָה) is elsewhere translated *sign*.
- 23 The "presence of Yahweh" here refers to Yahweh's ability to locate His presence at a specific location. It in no way limits His omnipresence throughout the creation, but does indicate, as do later Scriptures, that during the period of time from Adam through the life of Christ that God *emphasized* His presence locally. Later, in Moses' day, that emphasis was in the Tent of the Congregation, and later still in the Temple in Jerusalem. Today, God's presence on earth is through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the body of every believer.
- 24 From a root (נִדַּד) meaning *to wander*. An allusion to Cain's vagabond status.
- 25 The question often arises, "Where did Cain get his wife?" The biblical answer is tied up with the long antediluvian lives of the ancients. Adam's third son, Seth, was born when Adam, who lived 800 more years, was 130 years old (Genesis 5:3), which brings his lifespan to 930 years. During their lives, Adam had sons and daughters (Genesis 5:4).
- Clearly, at some point, brothers and sisters must have married, and given birth to children. There was no incest taboo at this time, so Cain would have had not only sisters, but other female kin, perhaps several generations removed, depending on when he had his son, Enoch.
- 26 Enoch comes from a root meaning *trained* or *dedicated*.
- 27 The first city mentioned in Scripture is Enoch. Many theologians hold this event to be the beginning of the world system, a not unreasonable belief.
- Was Enoch the first city? Probably, but the doctrinal significance is that there was a move toward urbanization, for in a city people cannot personally live off the land. Mercantilism immediately follows from city dwelling, and the development of all the things associated with buying and selling. Barter becomes very difficult without a monetary means of exchange.
- Furthermore, it implies a political change, for the desire to be powerful and rule over others is best possible where collective dwelling occurs. In the Hebrew Scriptures, the first monarchs were kings over cities, and their surrounding territory that supported city dwelling.
- Here, then, is a further movement away from God's original program for mankind instituted in the garden. It is the first step toward nationalization, and away from individual reliance on Yahweh to collective reliance on government.

End Notes

Yet God turned this process around for the benefit of mankind by allowing Israel to have a king, which ultimately will lead to the reestablishment of a pure theocracy through the King of Kings in the millennial period and beyond.

- 28 This short genealogy establishes four generations from Cain, and introduces Lemech, his most significant descendant.
- 29 The first of four biblical characters by this name. Enoch (חֲנוֹךְ) means *consecrated*. Names in the Hebrew language can be very significant, but sometimes, as is true today, parents named their children without thought of the name's meaning. One must take great care not to make too much of a proper name, whether given to a child, or to a city. Nevertheless, it is a good practice to search out the meaning of names to see if there might be some purpose behind the attribution.
- Not all proper names are discussed in this work, but as an illustration of how meanings of names are derived, I provide the etymology of the names in this genealogy.
- 30 Irad seems to be the same name as Arad (Numbers 21:1). It is from an unused root (עָרַד) that means *fugitive*.
- 31 A name derived from two roots: 1) *machah* (מָחָה), *to wipe out, destroy*, and 2) 'el, (אֵל), *God*. *Mechujael* (מְחֻיָּאֵל) means *destroyed by God*.
- 32 From two roots: 1) *mat* (מַת), *man* and 2) 'el, (אֵל), *God*. *Methushael* (מֶתוּשָׁאֵל) means *a man who is from God*.
- 33 *Lemech* (Heb. לֵמֶךְ = *Lemech*), though most English versions follow the KJV *Lamech*) is a name of uncertain origin. Two different men, both of some importance, were named Lemech in Genesis. This first Lemech, a descendant of Cain, is important mainly because of his children, and his act of murder (verses 23, 24, note). The other Lemech, a descendant of Cain's younger brother Seth, was Noah's father.
- 34 Here is the first recorded instance of polygeny, taking multiple wives. Moral decay is beginning to set in.
- 35 The sons of Lemech's wife named Adah (*ornament, decoration*), Jabal and his brother Jubal have names from a root that means *stream, a water way*. Jabal raised grazing animals that moved from place to place, and so is called *the father of those who dwell in tents*. His brother was a musician, perhaps one who developed and played musical instruments.
- 36 Throughout this section, *father* is not genetic. It metaphorically refers to the first person to perform certain activities.
- 37 This word, usually translated *cattle*, refers to any grazing animal, goats, sheep, horses, etc.
- 38 Lemech's second wife, Zillah (*shade, shadow*), had a son and a daughter. Tubal-cain (*Tubal, carrier, producer cain*) was associated with metal work, and was the word for *spear*.
- 39 Na'amah means *pleasure*.
- 40 What follows is a boast by Lemech to his wives about murdering two people. He killed a grown man (*'ish*) for bruising him, and a young lad (*yeled*) for hitting him. Evidently, Lemech had a temper problem.
- 41 Lemech compares his vile act with Cain's and requires greater leniency than that of Cain, a statement of supreme arrogance.
- 42 Here is introduced the Sethite branch of mankind, in contrast to the Canite branch. These two branches represent both what went wrong in the antediluvian world, and what went right. A third branch begins in chapter 6. The name Seth (שֵׁט), means *appointed one*, derived from a root meaning "to put, place, appoint," and carries the idea that this child was a substitute for Abel.
- 43 The name of Seth's son, Enosh (אֱנוֹשׁ) means *man* in the sense of *mankind*. It is of uncertain origin, but is used extensively in Scripture from this perspective.
- 44 The word *men* does not actually appear in the text at this place, but is assumed as the plural of the name Enosh. Some insert *people* instead of *men*, but the meaning is clear. During the life of Enosh, and presumably during the later part of Seth's life, there was widespread recognition of Yahweh among the Seth line, and perhaps more widely. Men began to call on Yahweh's name, probably meaning that they invoked His name in their righteous activities, thus giving Him preeminence. So, we have Seth's line having the most positive of all influences, while Cain's line was humanistic, moving away from Yahweh.