

Genesis 4 - Life (for God) after the Fall

Before we jump into Genesis 4, let's briefly recap a few things. First, who wrote Genesis (along with the rest of the Pentateuch)? Answer: Moses. Second, who was he writing to? Answer: the newly formed and emancipated people of Israel as they were wandering in a desert waiting to enter into the Promise Land. Third, why did he write this book? Answer: to tell the nation of Israel about the one true God who had rescued them, in order that they might live according to his will and that their children may do likewise (Deut 11:16-21).

In Genesis 1, God speaks everything into existence. He alone creates out of nothing and his creation reflects the work of an orderly God. We also see the introduction of certain Scriptural motifs such as the separation of elements and the rhythm of work and rest. Genesis 2 revisits the creation of man and woman. They are created equally in God's image, yet with distinct roles. The responsibility to bear God's image looks different for each one. We see this implied in the passage but addressed directly in other passages (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18). In Genesis 3, sin enters into the world. Adam and Eve are given the opportunity to choose God's way or their own way and they choose the latter. We humans have been stuck in that pattern of choosing ourselves first ever since.

As we continue to move through Genesis we must remember that it is a historical narrative and should be read as such¹. Just like a text book reads different than a play by Shakespeare so we cannot approach all the books in the Bible the same. Here are a few things to keep in mind when reading biblical narratives. Narratives record what happened. They do not include all the information, but only that which the narrator felt was needed to accomplish his purpose (John 21:25). Because they record what happened and not necessarily what *ought* to have happened (if things were done according to God's will of desire) they most often DO NOT have direct individual moral application.

In short, you do not do something just because someone in the Bible did it (regardless of whether God blessed them). We are not always told whether the person's actions were good or evil, but often are left to use those other parts of Scripture where God's will of desire is taught explicitly to decide whether the actions were good or bad. (Ex. Gideon's fleece, polygamy, Jabez's prayer, etc...). But narratives DO have something to teach us. While they do not usually directly teach a doctrine, they often illustrate doctrines taught explicitly elsewhere.

By Genesis 4 we already have a sense of the meta-narrative (or big picture story) of Scripture. The major players are in place and the plot is beginning to unfold. God is the protagonist and Satan (or evil) the antagonist. God's people are the minor players in Scripture; their stories are used to tell the reader about God. Always remember, the Bible is ultimately a story about God. The plot of the meta-narrative, simply put, is that of a world which was begun perfectly but has now fallen under the curse of sin. With sin comes death and the need for the world and everyone to be redeemed. But how will that redemption be achieved? This struggle for redemptions is the tension that runs through all of Scripture and into our day as well.

Genesis 4 is our first chance to see what life is like after the fall. Both the original audience and ourselves lived or live post-fall, so we would be wise to take note of what happens here. The Israelites were experiencing the effects of the fall and needed to know how to live with God in

¹ See Chapter 5, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Fee and Stewart

this time of separation and brokenness. So, what is the first thing Moses talks about? Under the inspiration of God, he immediately puts the focus is on worship. Put this in its historical context. Along with Genesis, Moses was also giving the Israelites the rest of the Pentateuch with its manifold rules and regulations. In all of the outward show of prescribed worship he did not want them to miss the most important thing. So he tells them about Cain and Abel, two historical characters whose lives demonstrate what true worship is about.

Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man." Later she gave birth to his brother Abel. Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. Gen 4:1-2

Adam and Eve have two sons, Cain and Abel. The name "Cain" (*qayin*) is a sound play on the Hebrew word "gotten" (*qaniti*)². There are many things that could probably be said about this, but I bring it up only to point out the literary nature of this writing. It was an oral history before it was a written history. By writing it down and then translating it we miss some of that literary character. You may not lose any meaning by not knowing the character, but it makes it easier for us to mistakenly read every verse in the Bible the same way.

In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the Lord. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. Gen 4:3-5

At any rate, as Adam and Eve's sons grow up Cain becomes a farmer and Abel becomes a shepherd. Notice the connection between work and worship in Genesis. Work is a good thing. It provides the means for both worship and life. It is part of our perfect created purpose; existing prior to the fall and being commanded after the fall (Gen 3:15; Ex 23:12; 1 Thes 4:12; 2 Thes 3:12). However, it did not escape the curse. Because of sin our efforts would be frustrated at times, but that does not mean we stop working.

Here we see both men offering a sacrifice out of the product of their labor. Cain is a farmer and wants to offer something to the Lord, so he brings some of his harvest. Notice that he does so first, thus not because he felt compelled to by Abel's example. Similarly, Abel as a shepherd brings some of his flock as an offering to the Lord. Yet the Lord does not look upon the offerings the same. Unlike many narratives we are being told God's evaluation of the situation. Don't miss that. Moses is giving his audience a view into God's will of desire.

Why favor one over the other? What was different? Remember, this is a narrative which means we will have to use other Scriptures to help us decide which differences are important. Take, for example, the most obvious difference between the offerings—plant vs. animal. Without the rest of the Pentateuch to tell us that both plants and animals were part of the acceptable means of sacrifice we might think that there is something inherently better about animal sacrifices.

What else was different? A closer look at the description will show that Cain brought some of the fruits while Abel brought the fat portions of the firstborn (*i.e.* the best of the best). Much significance is placed on giving the firstborn or first fruits to God. We see this throughout

² Utley, R. J. D. (2001). *Vol. Vol. 1A: How it All Began: Genesis 1-11*. Study Guide Commentary Series (59). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

Scripture (Ex 23:19; Lev 23:10; Nu 3:13; Neh 10:35; Rom 8:23; Jam 1:18; Rev 14:4). It is a gesture of trust in God, banking everything on the hope that he will continue to provide beyond that initial harvest. When we start by worrying about taking care of ourselves, we fail to seek first God's kingdom (Mat 6:25-34). Moreover, the first fruits are meant to provide for the work of the Kingdom building.³

How might we show trust for God today? What does it look like to give God the first and best of our fruit today? Most of us get paid with money for our work, so imagine that you have just cashed a paycheck. What do you do with it first? Do you pay your bills? Do you get your hair done? Do you buy that new pair of jeans or tennis shoes? Or do you set something aside for God before anything else? What about time? What is the first thing you do when you get a day off of work? Or a week? Do you lay around? Go on vacation? Or give some time to God and building his kingdom? When will we stop looking at building God's kingdom as an inconvenience, something that takes away from what we really want to do in life?

Make no mistake, family, it is the heart behind the gesture that ultimately matters. This story is not a formula. You do not give something to God expecting him to bless you with prestige and prosperity as some depraved men and women teach these days. Cain could have brought the best of his produce, but without the right heart he still would not have received God's favor. We know this for at least two reasons. First, in the text we see that God accepted Abel before his offering⁴. Second, we are also told clearly elsewhere in Scripture that our works do not save us let alone bring us physical blessing (Eph 2:1-10). Third, physical prosperity is not a result of faith. Look at Abel. What did his faith earn him on earth? Prosperity has nothing to do with faith. If anything, it distracts us from our need for God (Deu 8; Matt 13:22; 1 Tim 6:9-10).

The way we conduct ourselves in this world reveals the quality of our love for God (Jam 2:14-26; 1 John 3:16-18). Our conduct earns us nothing, but it tells the world who and what we are worshipping. Our hearts cannot be separated from our actions. Good trees bear good fruit (Matt 12:33; Luke 6:43-44). Those who are walking with the Spirit of God, will desire to do the things of God and will do them (Gal 5:16-26). In Genesis 4 we see these truths lived out. Cain went through the motions, but even the motions demonstrated that his heart was not engaged in the process.

We have talked about the issue of trust, but now let us turn to the idea of sacrificing. What, if anything, are we called to sacrifice today? Unlike the Israelites Moses was writing to, we are not held to the regimen of worship spelled out in the Pentateuch (Acts 15:19-20; Gal 2:11-20). No longer are we expected to be offering sacrifices of plants and/or animals. Instead, we are to sacrifice our lives (Rom 12:1-2). This does not mean we kill ourselves, because we are called to be living sacrifices--men and women who give their allegiance without reservation to King Jesus.

³ God's kingdom is one of rule over the hearts and minds of people. We build his kingdom from both without and within. We build from without by inviting people into the kingdom by sharing the gospel with them. And we build from within by hold each other accountable to Scripture and spurring one another on to love and good deeds.

⁴ "It has been noted by commentators, both ancient and modern, that God accepted Abel first and then his offering. This is always the order (cf. Heb. 11:4)." Utley, R. J. D. (2001). *Vol. Vol. 1A: How it All Began: Genesis 1-11*. Study Guide Commentary Series (59). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

But what does being a living sacrifice look like? First step, renew your mind with truth from Scripture and stop conforming to the broken patterns of this world. Do not merely give up that which you can afford to while still seeking your own pleasure and comfort; give it all up--your hopes and dreams and general sense of what life *ought to* look like. Stop bargaining with Jesus, "I'll go with you if you let me do this first or bring this along with me" (Luke 9:57-62). He wants all of us and will accept nothing less. He calls us to seek first His Kingdom and promises to take care of the rest (and by rest he means big things like what you're going to eat and wear and live in (Matt 6:25-34)). Measure your steps by how they affect your ability to build God's Kingdom, not by how good they feel or by the expectations of the fallen humans around you.

Then the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it." Now Cain said to his brother Abel, "Let's go out to the field." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?" Gen 4:6-9

Do what is right and the Lord will accept you. It is as simple as that and as hard as that. Cain thought "doing good" was purely a matter of actions. Do not make the same mistake. It is much more. It requires your heart, not in part but the whole of it. That is what makes it hard, even impossible for man alone. Faith set Abel's sacrifice apart (Heb 11:1-4). Abel loved God and sacrificed to him willingly. If Cain had loved God he would have been accepted (Mark 12:29-31). But his actions were done without love. All such actions are empty and wasted, no matter how impressive those "good" works appear (Mat 7:15-23; 1 Cor 13:1-3).

Family, hear this. NO ONE GETS TO BE WITH GOD BY GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS. Yes, faith in God and love for God *always* result in actions (Jam 2:14-26; 1 John 3:16-18). *But* actions do not save. We can nod with this and say amen to this but when Jesus asks you "Why should I let you into heaven?" what will you say? Will you tell him about how good of a person you are? Or about how you didn't steal or kill or commit adultery? I think that is what most self-proclaimed Christians will say. That is certainly what most everyone in our community says. But nothing could be further from the truth. There is no one righteous, not even one (Rom 3:10-18). Our good deeds, in themselves, are nothing more than filthy rags (Isa 64:6-7). Cain learned that lesson the hard way.

Because Cain did not do right (read "have faith in and love for God"), sin was crouching at his door. Sin desired to master and destroy him. It is the same with us.⁵ But what does God tell him? "You must master it," God says. Humans are not victims of sin or of Satan (Eph. 6:13; Jam 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:9). Adam and Eve were not allowed to shift the blame on someone else no matter how hard they tried. Neither could Cain. Everyone after Adam and Eve inherits a sinful nature from them. *But* we are responsible for our sin (Rom 5:12; Eze 18:20; Col 3:5).

Mastering sin is only possible for believers, who have filled by the Holy Spirit and so freed from the shackles of their sinful nature (Rom 6:11-18; Gal. 5:16-26). The beauty of the Spirit is that he frees us to bear God's image by birthing in us desires for godliness. No longer are we left hoping to muster enough self-discipline to avoid the sinful things that we desire, but our desires

⁵ We may liken this to Peter's description of Satan being like a roaring lion waiting to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). But notice, Satan is not named in this passage. In fact, this is the first time we see man sinning without Satan's explicit involvement.

are for the things of God. The Holy Spirit living in us desires that which is holy. Thus, to live righteously we simply have to do what we have new-found desire for. In such a state, we have only to walk into the good works he has prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10).

Notice the progression of sin in this passage. It starts with anger, as it often does, and it turns into murder. Other Scripture writers warn us to be careful not to sin when we are angry (Psa 4:4, Eph 4:26). Because of that we may be tempted to draw a sharp line between Cain's anger and his murder of Abel, but Jesus says they are very much the same (Mat 5:21-25). How many of you have been angry with someone? How many of you are harboring a grudge today? Take warning, family, you need not have killed like Cain to be guilty of the same.

The Lord said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Gen 4:10-12

God is omniscient. He knew when Adam and Eve sinned and He knew what Cain did. God did not need to ask Cain what had happened, but He gave Cain the chance to confess it. When Cain does not confess, then God calls Cain out. But notice the way He does it. God uses very poetic language, again reminding us of the literary character of the passage. "Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground." The imagery of blood and ground are important. For the Hebrew people, blood was the essence of life. It carried the "life force" of the body in it (Lev 17:11; Rev 6:9, 10).⁶ The ground, on the other hand, is the very thing that Cain's livelihood depended on. He had defiled it, and now it became doubly cursed to him.

Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." But the Lord said to him, "Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over." Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him. So Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Gen 4:13-16

Now that the punishment is handed out, see how Cain responds. He does not lament the fact that his brother is dead, but complains of the punishment. He is condemned to be a restless wanderer and outside of the presence of the Lord. Cain made his home in the land of Nod, which itself means "wandering" or "the land of wanderers." This is the picture of sinful mankind. Because of sin, the very world that was created for us now becomes at best a place of sojourning (Lev 25:23; 1 Chr 29:15; Psa 29:12).

The curse of wandering was also a poignant reminder to the Israelites of their own faithless state. At the time this was written they were themselves wandering in the desert, unable to enter into the promise land because they did not love or trust God enough to believe that He would provide for them (Num 14). The promise land became for them an offer, to the faithful, of rest from their desert wandering. Similarly, the new heaven and new earth are our rest from this earthly wandering (Heb 4:1-11).

⁶ Utley, R. J. D. (2001). *Vol. Vol. 1A: How it All Began: Genesis 1-11*. Study Guide Commentary Series (60). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

Cain lay with his wife, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Enoch. Cain was then building a city, and he named it after his son Enoch. ¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael was the father of Methushael, and Methushael was the father of Lamech. Gen. 4:17-18

This is an account of Cain's offspring. But, wait a minute, where did Cain's wife come from? Moses doesn't say, which means...it was not important to his purpose. Where Scripture is silent sometimes we are tempted to fill in the details. We feel obligated to take a lesson away from the Scripture, so when none is found we often simply insert our own. As we learned a few weeks ago, Genesis covers a lot of territory and leaves a lot unsaid. Don't go chasing after answers that, even if you had them, wouldn't lead you closer to Christ. It is simply not worth it.

What we have here is a genealogy, or family tree of sorts. When looking at genealogies in Scripture there are a few important things to keep in mind. Most importantly, Hebraic genealogies tend to highlight famous characters rather than include every detail or even every generation.⁷ They were not meant to tell us how old the earth is or even how many years passed between Abraham and Jesus, for instance. The names in this list do have meanings attached to them. Some are more clear than others. Feel free to look those up on your own.

Lamech married two women, one named Adah and the other Zillah. Adah gave birth to Jabal; he was the father of those who live in tents and raise livestock. His brother's name was Jubal; he was the father of all who play the harp and flute. Zillah also had a son, Tubal-Cain, who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron. Tubal-Cain's sister was Naamah. Lamech said to his wives, "Adah and Zillah, listen to me; wives of Lamech, hear my words. I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for injuring me. If Cain is avenged seven times, then Lamech seventy-seven times." Gen 4:19-24

This is Cain's line, which is shortly followed by Seth's line. In contrast with Seth's line this may well represent the sinful part of humanity, but we must not jump to the conclusion that everything mentioned in this list is evil (e.g. living in tents, raising livestock, playing music, metal-working). The narrator, who is speaking from God's point of view, never makes an evaluation. He is simply giving the Israelites the highlights of Cain's family history.

It does include an example of polygamy, which is not to be followed. Because Moses does not take a stance on the issue we must go elsewhere to learn that this is wrong. One man and one woman is the created order of marriage is repeatedly affirmed throughout both Old and New Testaments (Gen 2:24; Pro 5:18–19; Mal 2:14–15; Mark 10:2–8; 1 Cor 7:2, 10; 1 Tim 3:2, 12; and Tit 1:6). Any sexual union that deviates from that order is a violation of God's will of desire.

What is the point of Lamech's boast? I do not know for sure. From what I have read there are several competing arguments. It had meaning for its original audience that is not entirely clear to us today. And that is okay. There is probably some significance, though, to the number seventy-seven. It denotes an unlimited amount of, in this case, revenge. Jesus may well have had this passage in mind when he commanded his disciples to forgive "not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Mat 18:22).

⁷ Utley, R. J. D. (2001). *Vol. Vol. 1A: How it All Began: Genesis 1-11*. Study Guide Commentary Series (58). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the Lord. Gen 4:25-26

Contextually these verses belong with the next chapter so I will leave them for next week. We see overlap like this sometimes because chapter and verse divisions were not part of the original text of either the Hebrew Old Testament or the Greek New Testament. But here we begin to see a contrast between Cain's line and Seth's. Only when Seth's line is mentioned do we see people beginning to call upon the name of the Lord. This is the beginning of the chosen line.⁸

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for. By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible. By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead. Heb 11:1-4

The story of Cain and Abel is about sinful man relating to a holy God. We see in their lives the truth that worship, from the very beginning, was about the heart. Abel's sacrifice was approved because of his faith. Cain's was not because he lacked faith. Abel loved God above all else and trusted Him to provide. Cain did not. He wanted God on his terms, so he went through the motions of worship. But God would have none of that. Half-hearted worship cost Cain his livelihood and eternity with God. It will do the same for us.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise. Psa 51:16-17

How do we get back to God and how do we master sin in our lives? Is it by going to church or doing outreaches? Is it by reading the right books or by knowing the discipleship documents by heart? Is it by selling everything you have to give it to the poor? No. Those are all good things. They may lead you closer to God. *But* they can be done without ever loving God. So take a good look at your heart family. Are you all-in for God or are you still bargaining with Him? Are you trying to get God on your terms or worshipping as the Sovereign Creator that He is?

Ask yourself a few more questions.

1. Do you work to pay for your living? If not, make every effort to get a job (or marry someone with a job) so you can provide for God's work and your daily needs. If yes, are you worshipping God with the fruit of your labor? Does He get first dibs on your time, money, and energy?
2. Is your life set apart from those around you by your faith? Or would your life still make sense if God wasn't real?
3. Do you harbor any reservations about serving God whole-heartedly? Are there things you won't do or places you won't go for Him? Are you trying to serve Him *and* something else?
4. Are you going through the motions of Christianity but don't actually love God?

⁸ Utley, R. J. D. (2001). *Vol. Vol. 1A: How it All Began: Genesis 1-11*. Study Guide Commentary Series (64). Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International.

My purpose is not to scare faithful Christians who do not always feel as if they love God adequately. Rather, my purpose is to spur you on to sober self-examination. We do a lot of stuff in this Church. We love and serve and teach and learn and rebuke and grow and encourage. Hopefully we do this because God's Spirit is at work in us bearing fruit. We do so much good-looking stuff though that you might start to think that you are a good person by associating. You might be going through the motions, thinking that those motions are somehow earning you a place with God. If that is you, repent and draw near to God.

If you are not in a place where you can say, with confidence, that you love Jesus more than anything else, that you are willing to lay down everything in order to be with Him. Please talk with me or any other person in discipleship at Mack Ave. We would love to pray with you and walk with you.