



The First Murder

Dishonoring God leads to contempt for His creation.

GENESIS 4:1-15

When you love someone, you will have an interest in the things that interest them, and you will respect what belongs to them. A father who loves his daughter will be enthusiastic about her dance recital though he had no interest in dance until she started dancing. People care about the things the people they love care about. However, the opposite is also true, when one disrespects others, they have contempt for what belongs to them. Cain illustrates this truth in Genesis 4.

Name something you're passionate about or interested in because of someone else's influence.

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

GENESIS 4:1-6:7

Genesis 4:1-6:7 records the downward spiral of humanity after Adam and Eve's sin. Eve conceived and gave birth to her first son, Cain. She recognized this was a blessing from the Lord. Soon after, she gave birth to a second son, Abel. After this, sin raised its ugly head in the heart of Cain; he murdered his brother Abel. Cain spent the rest of his life as a fugitive, but God mercifully promised to protect him from those who would harm him (Gen. 4:1-16). Cain fled east to the land of Nod, which means "homeless," and had a son, Enoch. Soon

after, Cain built a city and named it Enoch after his son (4:17). The following verses contain Cain's genealogy and reveals the ongoing sinful nature passed down to him and his descendants (4:19,23-24).

Genesis 4:25–5:32 contains the genealogy of Seth. After Cain murdered his brother and God banished him from his family, God gave Adam and Eve another son, Seth, whose name means “substitute.” Seth would become the beginning of the chosen line to fulfill God's promise in Genesis 3:15. While Cain's descendants were arrogant, self-indulgent, dishonoring of God, and disdainful of the value of life, many of Seth's descendants worshiped the Lord (4:25-26).

Genesis 5 traces Adam's genealogy through Seth up to the time of Noah. This section demonstrates the continuing effects of sin. “Then he died” occurs eight times. This genealogy also highlights God's kind faithfulness to humanity to bless it and allow it to multiply. It lists people like Enoch, who walked with God for 300 years and was such a godly man that, instead of dying, “God took him” (5:21-24). Also, when Lamech's son, Noah, was born, he prophesied that Noah would bring relief because of the toil that the curse of sin had brought upon them (5:28-29). The section ends with one central theme: the widespread wickedness of the human race. It deeply grieved the Lord, and He said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land . . . for I am sorry that I have made them” (6:7).

As you read Genesis 4:1-15, consider what our personal responsibility to God and others is.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

RIVALRY (GEN. 4:1-7)

¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD.” ² And again, she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a worker of the ground. ³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, ⁴ and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, ⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his face fell. ⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? ⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it.”

VERSE 1

Verse 1 records the first birth of a baby in human history. In Genesis 3:15-16, God indicated that Adam and Eve would have a son, and so they did. His name was •*Cain*, and his birth points again to God's faithfulness to His promises. When the child was born, Eve's statement that she *I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD* indicates she realized God was at work. Literally, the Hebrew can be translated, “I have acquired a male, the LORD.” If this is correct, then it seems to indicate Eve believed *Cain* was the promised offspring who would strike the head of the serpent and restore the relationship between humanity and God (Gen. 3:15). Either way, Eve recognized God's hand in Cain's birth, and in response she expressed her gratitude and faith.

VERSE 2

Verse 2 indicates that Eve had another son whose name was •*Abel*. It is important to note how the text communicates this. *Abel* is introduced as *his brother*, with *his* referring to Cain. This indicates that Cain is central to this passage. Abel never says a word. The focus on Cain will show the continuing downward spiral of the human race. Adam and Eve had to be persuaded to sin against God; Cain would not be dissuaded from sinning against God even by God Himself. Adam took his punishment without a word; Cain took issue with God's punishment.

Moses also records that, like his father, Cain became a farmer. But Abel grew up to be a *keeper of sheep*. This information is important in setting the context for what was about to transpire. Throughout history, since ancient times, the occupations of farming and shepherding have provided occasions for rivalry and strife with one another. But here they play a subordinate role, if any role at all, since God approved of both occupations. At the heart of the matter is the difference in the spiritual conditions of these two men before God, not their occupations.

***Cain kept the best for himself;
Able offered to God the best that he had.***

VERSES 3-4a

Verses 3-4a describe the worship practices of Cain and Abel. Verse 3 is the first recorded offering to the Lord. However, one should beware of concluding that this was the first offering ever made to God. The phrase, *in the course of time*, possibly means this was the practice of the two brothers who would have probably learned to do so from their father, Adam. This text indicates that *Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground*, and Abel's offering was *the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions*.

This is noteworthy. Cain did not offer to God the firstfruits of his produce. Instead, he offered to God only some of his crop. In contrast, Abel not only offered to God some of the firstborn of his flock but also what was considered the best part of them, their fatty portions. Later, when Moses gave God's law to Israel, both grain offerings and blood offerings were appropriate ways to express love and devotion to the Lord. However, what was emphasized is that they were to come from the firstfruits (Deut. 26:2-4) and the firstborn (Deut. 15:19). It is true that neither Cain nor Abel had access to the law of Moses, so one might ask how they would have known what was required. The issue was not one of following a set of directions—it was an issue of the heart. Cain kept the best for himself; Abel offered to God the best that he had.

VERSES 4b-5

God accepted Abel's offering but rejected Cain's offering. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for *offering* may refer to a gift that is given to anyone, or to the *offering* of an animal to the Lord, or more technically to the grain offering that was to be offered to the Lord according to the law of Moses. So it seems reasonable that if God's law indicates He would receive both grain and animal offerings, then He had no problem with both kinds of offerings Cain and Abel offered to Him.

Consequently, the types of offerings Cain and Abel made had nothing to do with God's acceptance or rejection of them. It had everything to do with the quality of the offerings. Apparently, Cain's offering was more an act of perfunctory duty. He kept the best of his crop for himself. Abel's offering was truly a sacrifice, offering to God that which was costly, the very best that he had. What's more, God saw what was in their hearts. God only accepts expressions of worship from those who have hearts that are faithful to Him (Hos. 6:6). The writer of Hebrews indicates that God accepted Abel's offering because it was offered in faith (Heb. 11:4). In contrast, the apostle John wrote that Cain "was of the evil one" (1 John 3:12). Cain's furious response reveals what was in his heart. It was not the response of a humble man of faith.

***God only accepts expressions of worship from those
who have hearts that are faithful to Him.***

VERSES 6-7

When God asks people questions in the Bible, it is not because He needs to know the answers. God is certainly omniscient. God used questions to confront people with the truth and give them the opportunity to admit the truth, just as He did with Adam and Eve in the garden after they had sinned. So when God asked Cain why he was so furious and looked despondent, it was God's way of confronting Cain with his sinful heart, which was the reason God rejected Cain and his offering.

God's question is also instructional. With the understanding that a person who is righteous will do what is right, God reminded Cain that He would not have rejected Cain if he had done what is right. God was exhorting Cain to learn to do what is right.

Given what had transpired, Cain was at a crossroad of decision. He could learn to do what is right or give in to the desire that was crouching at the door of his heart to sin more. God urged Cain to repent of his sin lest he be consumed by it. If Cain continued in sin, sin would rule his life. But if he would resist it, repent, and do what was right, then there was hope for him. And if Cain continued in sin, it would be because he chose to do so, not because God had rejected him and his offering.

What are dangers of letting jealousy and anger go unchecked?

SENTENCED (GEN. 4:8-12)

⁸ Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him. ⁹ 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 the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. ¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. ¹² When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth."

VERSE 8

Unfortunately, Cain refused to listen to God's warning. Instead, he let his unresolved anger fester to the point where it ruled his heart, and he murdered his brother. It is this kind of anger that the apostle John referred to when he wrote, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer" (1 John 3:15). Given that Cain invited Abel to go out into the field with him, it appears Cain was consumed with hatred and bitterness which lead to the premeditated murder of his brother. The first-born son of sinful man was a murderer. Such is the nature of sin as it is passed down from one generation to the next. Adam and Eve experienced the consequences of sin by experiencing the death of their youngest son by the hands of their oldest.

KEY DOCTRINE: *Man*

Through the temptation of Satan, man transgressed the command of God and fell from his original innocence whereby his posterity inherit a nature and an environment inclined toward sin. (See Romans 3:10-18; 5:12.)

VERSES 9-10

God confronted Cain with two simple questions. First, He inquired of the whereabouts of Abel. Cain lied to God, saying: "*I don't know.*" Then he brashly shot back a question to God asking, "*am I my brother's keeper?*" This question revealed Cain's complete disdain for his brother and his dismissal of any notion he was responsible for him. Cain's attitude was contrary to how the family of God is to function. Within the family of God, we are responsible for looking out for the needs of one another. Second, God confronted Cain with his sin by asking him, "*What have you done?*" Then, God told Cain that his brother's blood was crying out to Him, indicating that Cain could not hide his sin from God (Ps. 90:8; Rom. 2:16).

VERSES 11-12

Since both the serpent and Cain were liars and murderers (John 8:44), it is fitting that just as the serpent was cursed by God in the garden, Cain was the first human to be cursed by God. Also, just as Adam and Eve were banished from the garden, God banished Cain from the land. Cain would be a wandering fugitive who would have to scrape for food.

To what extent are we responsible for others? How does that affect our personal responsibility toward God?

God's concern for the righteous, Abel, was matched by His compassion toward the sinner, Cain.

PLEA (GEN. 4:13-15)

¹³ Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear. ¹⁴ Behold, you have driven me today away from the ground, and from your face I shall be hidden. I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." ¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, "Not so! If anyone kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD put a mark on Cain, lest any who found him should attack him.

VERSES 13-15

Cain complained to God that his punishment was too harsh. Instead of showing any sign of remorse or even acknowledgment of guilt, he was concerned about his well-being. This is amazing given that Cain deserved to die for what he had done.

Cain was concerned that if God was not going to justly execute him, then someone else would. Therefore, showing even more mercy and grace, God put some kind of mark of protection on Cain so that no one would kill him. Speculation on what the mark was is probably futile. The point here is the great mercy and grace of God toward the sinner. Incomprehensibly, God's concern for the righteous, Abel, was matched by His compassion toward the sinner, Cain. It is just as inconceivable that "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). Nevertheless, God does, and Christ did.

In what ways does God's grace work in conjunction with His justice and righteousness?

BIBLE SKILL: *List the steps of Cain's sin using James 1:12-15.*

Read both Genesis 4:1-15 and James 1:12-15. Note the steps of progression in sin. Using the information in those verses, match the steps in Cain's sin with the progression from James. What does this tell us about our own struggle with temptation and sin?

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must resolve anger before it grows into sin.
- People must take responsibility for their sin.
- Believers can find God's grace even in our just punishment.

Discuss as a group ways God shows grace even in His just punishment. Why are people so reluctant to take responsibility for sin? How can your Bible study group foster personal accountability?

Why is unresolved anger so dangerous? Is there anger in your life that needs to be dealt with? (See Eph.4:26.) How can you deal rightly with your anger?

Memorize Genesis 4:7.

PRAYER NEEDS
