

(Gen. 4:1) - There were no children born to Adam and Eve before the Fall, but there were many born to them after the fall (*cf. Gen. 5:4-5*). Cain was the first male child, and Abel was the second. Seth and many others came later. Some interpreters believe that when Cain was born, Eve thought he was the savior promised in *Genesis 3:15* and pictured in *Genesis 3:21*. She stated at his birth, “*I have gotten THE man from the Lord,*” or “*I have gotten a man with the help of Jehovah* (the Lord who saves).”

(Gen. 4:2) - God has singled out these two sons of Adam to establish by example and reinforce what He had taught Adam and Eve - redemption and salvation by His free and sovereign grace in Christ Jesus (redemption by blood) (*cf. Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22*). The Lord God showed them the impossibility of salvation by even the best works of men (*cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-20; Titus 3:4-7*). The way of Abel is the way of grace - salvation conditioned on Christ. The way of Cain is the way of works - salvation conditioned on sinful people. In reality, there are only two religions in the world - grace and works. They will not mix or cohabit (*Rom. 11:6*). All who attempt to come to God must choose one or the other, and the Bible shows us that by nature none of us will choose God’s way by grace. By nature, we are all like Cain. But God has determined to show mercy to some, like Abel (*Rom. 9:15-16*), and He tells us that His mercy is only to be found in Christ and based on His righteousness alone. All who desire salvation God’s way beg for mercy in Christ (*Luke 18:13*). Now, Cain was a farmer, and Abel was a shepherd.

(Gen. 4:3) - Cain and Abel were not young boys at this time, but they were evidently heads of households with wives and children. During this time the fathers, or the heads of the household, were, in essence, the priests of their families. This carried on into the time of the patriarchs of Israel which began with Abraham and went on until the Old Covenant priesthood was established. We know that God had instructed Adam as to how and where he was to seek atonement for sin and worship and approach the living God (*cf. Gen. 3:21-24*). Adam, in turn, had taught his sons and daughters as Abraham later taught Isaac (*cf. Gen. 22:6-7*). This is the Gospel of Christ wherein the righteousness of God is revealed in type and picture (*Rom 1:16-17*). So, Cain and Abel, as heads of families, brought their offerings to God. Cain brought the fruit of the ground which he had worked and raised.

(Gen. 4:4) - Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. “*And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering.*” The Lord God accepted both Abel’s person and Abel’s offering, because the person is identified by the offering. This is a picture of a believer’s oneness (union) with Christ Who is every believer’s Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. All whom God brings to believe in Christ are one with Him in view of God’s law and justice. Christ’s blood is the full payment of the sin-debt of everyone of God’s elect. Christ’s righteousness has been imputed to everyone of God’s elect. And, like Abel, when God is pleased to reveal Himself to them, they will all come before God, like Abel, pleading the blood (i.e. the righteousness) of the Lord Jesus Christ. Why did God have respect unto Abel’s offering?

(1) It was an offering of blood which meant satisfaction to God’s law and justice - righteousness established for Abel by the Lord Jesus Christ.

(2) It was a confession of sin, depravity, guilt, defilement. Abel came humbly before God, realizing his need of a substitute, a righteousness he could not produce. It is important that we understand the distinction between Abel and Cain was not because Abel was a better person than Cain. Abel was (and is) a sinner saved by grace.

(3) It was a confession of the inadequacy of his best efforts to keep the law and establish a righteousness of his own. Abel knew that righteousness could only come by the promised Savior.

(4) It was an offering of God-given faith (*Heb. 11:4*). Abel believed and obeyed God. He came to God the way God told him to come, and the way God brought Him (*John 6:44-45*).

(5) It was an offering that typified the Lord Jesus Christ, the woman's seed, and salvation based on His righteousness alone. Christ is the Lamb of God, the innocent dying for the guilty. The lamb had to be a male of the first year, in the prime of life, without spot, without sin. It had to be slain (*Gen. 3:21*), shedding its blood, and roasted with fire. Christ suffered and shed His blood for our sins.

(Gen. 4:5) - God had no respect either for Cain or his offering. What was wrong with Cain's sacrifice?

(1) It was a bloodless sacrifice, thereby denying the law and justice of God (*Rom. 8:7*).

(2) It denied his own sinfulness, his depravity, his guilt, and defilement

(3) It denied his need of a Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ. Cain would be his own high priest, his own mediator, and his own intercessor.

(4) It exalted himself, his own works and efforts, and denied that he deserved condemnation and death based on his best efforts to serve God. He approached God on the grounds of his own merit and works. He was proud of the fruit of his fields (*Rom. 6:23*).

(5) It was evidence of unbelief and disobedience as he refused God's way of atonement, acceptance, and worship (*Gen. 3:24* - propitiatory offering; *Luke 24:44-47*; *Eph. 1:6-7*).

(Gen. 4:6-7) - Cain was angry and depressed over the fact that God would accept neither him nor his offering. Whatever comfort and assurance the religion of works will give to its followers, it will not last. God will not and cannot be reconciled to any sinner on the basis of any work that sinner performs (only in Christ - *2 Cor. 5:18-21*). Cain was not angry with himself, as he should have been. He was angry with God and with his brother. But notice how the Lord told him that he had no proper reason to be angry - "*If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door.*"

"Doest well" and "doest not well" must be understood from the context. Many suppose that the Lord was telling Cain, "You need to be a better person. You need to be more sincere." This is not the case. Cain's problem was not insincerity. His problem was pride, self-righteousness, and unbelief. DOING WELL is what God brought Abel to do - come before God as a sinner seeking mercy in and by the Lord Jesus Christ (*cf. Isa. 1:17-19*). DOING NOT WELL is what Cain did - come before God based on His works and rejecting God's way of salvation by grace in Christ. To come before God as Cain did is to leave oneself open to the destruction of sin - "*if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.*" This metaphorically states that if a sinner rejects God's way of salvation, then sin is like a beast crouching at the door and waiting to devour him. He has the impossible task of defeating this ravenous beast. The Lord showed Cain the impossibility of any sinner defeating sin by his own works. Without Christ, sin will destroy and make an end of all sinners (*1 Cor. 15:56*; *James 1:14-15*). We need one who can make an end of sin (*Dan. 9:24*; *1 Cor. 15:57*).

(Gen. 4:8) - Rather than repenting and coming to God by faith in Christ Jesus, Cain was angry with his brother and killed him. The first murder was over salvation by grace vs. salvation by works. Again, grace and works cannot mix, and by nature, unbelieving people hate, not only the light of God's Word as it exposes their darkness, but also the people of God who bring and promote this message of God's grace in Christ (*Matt. 10:16-22*; *John 3:19-20*; *15:18-16:3*; *1 John 3:11-12*).