

GENESIS 4:1-16 (EAST OF EDEN)

Introduction: In 1952, John Steinbeck wrote the novel *East of Eden*. It's a book which wanders through the subjects of depravity, beneficence, and love. It details the human struggle for acceptance, greatness, and freedom and it also relates man's capacity for self-destruction.

East of Eden ties these themes together with a heap of references and parallels to the Bible, but especially Genesis Chapter 4. In the book, Steinbeck uses quite a few allusions to Cain and Abel. An interesting one is his use of the first letters of Cain and Abel – C & A – for the names of the main characters – Charles and Adam, Caleb and Aron, Cathy Ames, etc.

Throughout the book, there are all kinds of fun parallels and contrasts to the biblical account, some of which are so well concealed that you really need to pay attention to every detail. For example one of the characters, Charles, gets a dark scar on his forehead while trying to move a boulder from his fields.

In Genesis 4, as we'll see today, Cain is given a mark by God. If we compare other marks on people in the Bible, it's a good assumption this mark was on Cain's forehead as well. In another account in the book, a different "C" character, Caleb, is described as having a more dark and sinister appearance than the character Aron – again, a parallel we'll see today.

If you pay attention, you can see all kinds of little details that Steinbeck placed carefully in the book for the person who is studious enough to find them.

Despite being considered a great book, East of Eden hasn't come close to the total number of sales of the Bible, nor has it lasted through thousands of years like the Genesis account has.

In the end, it is the Bible which is the source of understanding human history, human nature, and the only highway we can take to return to that wondrous spot we left so long ago. Everything else is, after all, a knock off of the original and was printed east of Eden, outside the Garden of Delight.

Text Verse: “Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *And* to heed than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion *is as* the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness *is as* iniquity and idolatry. 1 Samuel 15:22, 23

May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. Great Expectations and Dashed Hopes – Verses 1 & 2

¹ Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.”

² Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

In these two simple verses, we see the hope of a woman looking for her return to paradise and then her dejection when she realizes that she must have misunderstood what God had previously said.

In His curse of the serpent, God said this to him –

And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.”

Eve was standing right there and heard it all. She had heard that her Seed would be the One to undo the treacherous works of the devil. When she named her first son Cain, or *Qayin*, she exclaimed, “I have acquired a man with the Lord.”

The word “acquired” is from the Hebrew word *qaniti* and it’s where *Qayin* comes from. As we travel through the Bible, you’ll see this pattern occur innumerable times. A sentence will give the name of a person and that name will usually be based on another word within the same sentence.

There’s a quite a bit involved in what Eve said here. She said, “I have acquired a man **with** the Lord.” The Hebrew word for “with” in this sentence is rather important. It is translated from the word *eth*. However,

another word could have been used – *im*. The difference between these two words is immense and it signifies what she was thinking.

In saying she had acquired a man “with” the Lord, she was taking credit for what she thought would be the delivery of her Deliverer.

Think of it this way, if I say I’m writing a book with a typewriter, then the typewriter isn’t really doing anything. Instead I am doing the work and the typewriter is a passive participant in the process.

However, if I say I’m writing a book with my brother Ethan, then he is an active participant in the process and deserves more credit than just supplying the ink to the paper. We both put in the effort and we both deserve whatever benefits come from it.

This is exactly what Eve was claiming when she said, *eth* instead of *im*. It’s me... “I’ve acquired a man and I did it with the LORD. We are working together to bring in the Deliverer.”

There’s a lesson in this and it carries throughout the rest of the Bible. In the book of Jonah we read this right at the end of Chapter 2 – “Salvation is of the LORD.”

In Ephesians, Paul explains it this way –For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that **not of yourselves**; *it is* the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Eve’s idea that she had something, anything at all in fact, to do with her salvation was completely misguided. The Lord is the One who works out our salvation and He did it and does it in His own timing. There will be no boasting when we stand before God and proclaim what He alone has done for us.

As Mary wisely said when she was told she would bear the Savior of the world – “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.”

There was no boasting and no claim of participation in the effort. In her song of praise at what would occur, she places all the credit on God alone –

⁴⁶ And Mary said:

“My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ And my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. ⁴⁸ For He has regarded the lowly state of His maidservant; For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed. ⁴⁹ For He who is mighty has done great things for me, And holy is His name. –Luke 1:46-49

Mary is mentioned only a few more times in the Bible and no note of attention is drawn to her. After Acts Chapter 1, she is never mentioned again.

Going back to Eve, we see that immediately after naming Cain the very next words are... words of dejection and hopelessness –

“Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel.”

The Bible doesn't tell us how old Cain was when Abel was born, but he was old enough for Eve to see that he wasn't the one to restore her to Eden. We can know this simply by the meaning of Abel's name. Abel, or *Hevel*, means “breath.” This is the kind of breath that you watch disappear on a cold day – a mere mist.

In the book of Ecclesiastes, this same word, *hevel*, is translated as “vanity” in the King James Version and “meaningless” in the NIV.

By the time Abel arrived, her outlook on life had gone from being the boastful woman who had a part of her own salvation to the unhappy surrender of a dejected soul that would spend the rest of her days in life under the sun... never returning to the bliss she had known in the Garden of Eden. All was vanity... disappearing vapor in a cold and meaningless world.

To finish out verse 2, we read that Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. In this thought, we can't find any fault in the choice of profession for either of them. Moses, David, and a host of other

noted biblical figures tended flocks like Abel, but numerous others tilled the ground or worked in agriculture.

Boaz, the great and heroic figure of the book of Ruth was a tiller of the ground and the prophet Amos was a both a sheep breeder and a tender of the sycamore fig tree. What is apparent is that they worked with their hands just as Adam's sentence in the Garden of Eden indicated they would.

Both of these professions, tending flocks and harvesting grain, are used symbolically throughout the Bible to give us insights into the workings of God in general and the work of Jesus in particular. If you follow the agricultural themes closely, you will better understand the Creator's dealings with man.

II. The Offering of Faith – Verses 3-6

³ And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.

⁴ Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering,

⁵ but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

⁶ So the LORD said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen?"

⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it."

The opinions on why God respected one offering and didn't respect the other are varied and are highly argued over. I reviewed some of the most noted commentators in Christian history, and many of them give note to Jewish sources going back to antiquity and there is no happy resolution to be found there.

The only proper way to determine why Abel's offering was accepted is to let the Bible interpret the Bible and unfortunately, none of the commentaries I read fully do this.

I'll note the two prevalent views that have been given so you can see how people look at what happened. The first is inferred from the terminology given in the verse – that “Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD” whereas “Abel also brought of the **firstborn** of his flock and of their fat.”

The terminology of Abel's offering being the “firstborn of his flock” has led to the thought that Cain's offering wasn't of the firstfruits of the harvest and therefore wasn't the first and best. Because of this, Abel's offering was accepted – it was a good offering, and Cain's wasn't because it wasn't a good offering.

This isn't a bad interpretation, but it must be inferred. It also needs to infer that this was the time of the firstfruit of the harvest, something we can't know from the account. If it wasn't, then there's no way we can assign this particular guilt to Cain.

For all we know, they made the offering in the middle of the harvest season. All that it says is that he “brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD.” Anything else must be inferred.

The second opinion about why one offering was accepted and the other wasn't is that Abel's offering was a blood sacrifice – one for atonement of sins and therefore it was accepted by God, but Cain's wasn't and therefore it was unacceptable.

To substantiate this view, it's noted that God killed an animal to clothe Adam and Eve and therefore the precedent was made at that time. Unfortunately, this reads much more into the text than is given, and when the Hebrew is reviewed it becomes a view which **cannot** be substantiated.

God provided the atonement, or covering, for Adam and Eve, but nothing more is told us in that account. To state that this was to be the precedent for future generations is again, inserting our personal thoughts into the text.

Secondly, in **both** offerings, the Hebrew word *minchah* is used. In the Law of Moses, a *minchah* is only a non-blood sacrifice, but the offering of both Cain and Abel are called *minchah*.

It would be inappropriate to insert the Law of Moses into a date prior to the Law of Moses. And even if we could, because of the term used, **both** are to be considered equally acceptable offerings – they are both *minchah*. Grain offerings are not only acceptable under the Mosaic Law, they are mandated. If God accepted them, and they have the same term applied here, then one being a blood sacrifice and one not being a blood sacrifice is irrelevant.

And finally, each offering came from the livelihood of the individual. There is no other direction given in the account or before it to indicate that they had to cross the lines of their profession in order to make an offering. If this was the case, then something important would have, again, been left out of the story.

But we can know, with one hundred percent certainty why one offering was accepted and the other wasn't. All we need to do is look elsewhere in the Bible to get the answer.

Of all the commentaries I read, only one came close to the correct reason. It noted that in the other options, something extra has to be read into the text. When we do that, then interpretation is left completely up to us and so the Bible means whatever we decide.

This is an important lesson to remember. Unless something is painfully evident from the text, we need to state opinion as opinion and not jump to conclusions without evidence. This commentary was right, but even it added in thoughts which aren't supported by the verse.

In the end, the Bible in Hebrews 11 answers why one offering was accepted and the other wasn't – “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

The offering was an offering of **faith** and it is the faith which made the offering more excellent. If you understand this you will understand the importance of faith in both testaments of the Bible.

It wasn't faith that made Abel bring a **more excellent sacrifice**. Instead it was faith that **made the sacrifice more excellent**. If you can understand this difference, then you're on the highway to the most complete and friendly walk possible with your Creator.

The rest of the Bible, in both testaments, bears this out. It isn't the **type** of offering and it isn't the **amount** of offering that God respects. It is the **faith behind the offering**. Here are two examples and we'll move on –

(1) With what shall I come before the LORD, *And* bow myself before the High God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, With calves a year old? ⁷ Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams, Ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn *for* my transgression, The fruit of my body *for* the sin of my soul? ⁸ He has shown you, O man, what *is* good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justly, To love mercy, And to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:6-8

The sacrifices mentioned are exactly what the law asked for. In fact, in Isaiah 1, these mandatory sacrifices are said to make the LORD weary. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, Or of lambs or goats. ¹²When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts?”

Who required these sacrifices? God did! And yet he rejected them because they lacked faith.

God couldn't care diddly about the type or amount of offering if the heart of the individual isn't right with Him.

(2) Now Jesus sat opposite the treasury and saw how the people put money into the treasury. And many *who were* rich put in much. ⁴² Then one poor widow came and threw in two mites, which make a quadrans. ⁴³ So He called His disciples to *Himself* and said to them, “Assuredly, I say to you that

this poor widow has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; ⁴⁴ for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood.” Mark 12:41-44

The Lord looks for faith in His faithless creatures, so even a little bit will do.

III. A Faithless Life, verses 8-12

Cain’s offering was lacking faith and the Bible bears out that the rest of his existence was one of lacking faith as well. His faithless deeds testified against him then, and they still testify today – 6000 years later.

⁸ Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, 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?” He said, “I do not know. *Am* I my brother’s keeper?”

¹⁰ And He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.

¹¹ So now you *are* cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.

¹² When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.”

Cain was the first recorded male born in human history and if you want to reflect on how ingrained sin is in each of us, just look to this account and you can tell. This first recorded son of Adam was a murderer and a liar as we’ve seen right here.

Another thing these verses tell us is the confirmation of the premise that all human beings are born into sin, born spiritually dead, and born separated from God. We have inherited Adam’s death in at least three ways – legally, potentially, and seminally. How can we tell? Because the Bible teaches that it is so.

First, the very fact that Cain murdered and lied indicates he inherited Adam’s sin.

Second, Abel died when he was struck by his brother, but the Bible doesn't record Abel having committed any sin. But the wages of sin is death. Therefore, if Abel died and didn't resurrect, then he must have inherited Adam's sin or the Bible has left us without needed information concerning some other sin Abel committed.

Third, both sons – Cain and Abel – presented offerings to the Lord and there is no record of a command for them to have done so. Such offerings can't be related to either a command or to human invention. These first recorded offerings occurred after the fall and take separation from God as a given. They were design specifically to satisfy the innate desire to restore man's separation from God.

In other words, the entire account shows us, without any hint of a doubt, that these sons of Adam were born in sin and were separated from God by their spiritually dead state.

After the rejection of his offering, Cain set the terrible pattern of sin which has infected many souls since then – He became defiant in that sin. Adam and Eve were truly scared about what they'd done and tried to cover things up. And eventually they even tried to pass the buck about their deed.

But Cain, when he was confronted showed the hardness of his heart and his defiant attitude by first lying – “I don't know” he said, and then getting snippy at God, “Am I my brother's keeper?”

The question is actually a good one for all of us and should be addressed. Are we our brother's keeper? The answer by necessity is “yes and no.” So there is a slight taste of truth in Cain's answer.

He wasn't responsible for his brother in the ultimate sense. Abel could go wandering off with the flocks and Cain was under no obligation to watch over him at the expense of his own fields and his own harvest.

And we aren't responsible in any complete sense for anyone else who has right reason and a healthy body. They are their own keepers and their own problem. The things they do are from their own free will. To limit that in

another person is to subject them to slavery and to deplete the very thing that allows them to be human.

On the other hand, we are our brother's keeper. We're under the obligation to keep from harming others maliciously and even taking care of what we harm unintentionally. We're also under the obligation to not hinder others from determining their own paths and avenues of happiness.

And finally, we are to take care of those who can't take care of themselves. Both testaments bear these things out and so yes we are our brother's keeper and no, we aren't our brother's keeper. Everything in context, and everything to the glory of God.

The response Cain gave though is a cunning attempt to hide any culpability at all in the matter of his brother. It is the response of a selfish, brutal, and hate-filled soul. Unless God called him to account, his murderous attitude would truly become the only standard on which he or anyone else could develop.

In essence, this first recorded sin after the fall would become standard operating procedure for all humanity. "God doesn't see and it's all up to me."

But the LORD knew and acted, and the world was diverted, at least for a time, from turning to complete and absolute wickedness. Unfortunately, as we'll see by Chapter 6, wickedness is an ongoing problem and needs to be dealt with more than once.

After his less than kind response to the LORD, Cain was told that the blood of Abel cried out from the ground. The word "blood" is the Hebrew word *dame* or "bloods." Does this mean that the blood itself cried out, or is it as early Jewish writings understand the verse – that his posterity was crying out – a posterity that actually existed or would have existed if they had been born.

This same type of terminology is given in 2 King 9 when speaking of the death of Naboth, who was killed for a field that King Ahab wanted. There it

says, "Surely I saw yesterday the blood of Naboth and the blood of his sons,' says the LORD..."

This actually makes a lot of sense because when Abel sacrificed, it may have been for him and his family; just as we see in the book of Job. This is even more validated in a few verses by what Cain said after his sentence is pronounced – a sentence which he brought on by his own actions.

We finish with, "The LORD said to him, "So now you *are* cursed from the earth..." and "When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth." This is the sentence of Cain for his actions and his response shows how truly hard his heart was.

IV. East of Eden, verses 13-16

¹³ And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment *is* greater than I can bear!

¹⁴ Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen *that* anyone who finds me will kill me."

¹⁵ And the LORD said to him, "Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him.

¹⁶ Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden.

Cain was worried about his own punishment, which was less than it deserved, when his younger brother, who was better than he, lay dead in the ground. He was left to aimlessly wander the earth as a vagabond and even the ground wouldn't yield for him. Whatever he sowed would fail. The Bible makes a contrast between the sowing of unrighteousness with the harvesting of faith. Cain sowed the ground with the blood of his brother because he was jealous of Abel. But as we saw, it was by Abel's faith that his offering was acceptable to God.

Cain's lack of faith, instead of being converted through that lesson, led to the murder of his brother and that would result in no harvest at all, even for the duration of his life.

We have exactly this same thing going on in the world today. Christians are killed in huge numbers for their faith by the modern spiritual successors to Cain – the “peaceful” religion of Islam. But in the end, those faithful Christians will stand in judgment over those who kill the body but who can't harm the soul. The way of Cain leads to death and the faith of Abel will last for eternity.

After his sentencing, Cain cried out “I shall be hidden from Your face.” The greatest honor that can be bestowed on a person is to have the face of God shine on them. For this reason, the High Priestly Prayer not only includes it, but it states it twice –

“The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance upon you,
And give you peace.”

In 1 Peter it says the reciprocal is true for evildoers – “For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, And His ears are open to their prayers; But the face of the LORD is against those who do evil.”

And in 1 Corinthians it says that because of Jesus we are receiving the reflection of the glory of the Lord with unveiled faces.

Cain understood this in his limited way and cried out at the loss – a loss which he had brought upon himself. Even to this day, Cain is the biblical example of the wicked son who remains forever out of the favor of the Lord.

A couple minutes ago I said that it's possible the “blood of Abel crying out from the ground” may actually be referring to his offspring. Cain's next

response may validate that. After noting that he was hidden from the Lord's face, he says that "it will happen *that* anyone who finds me will kill me."

Obviously anyone alive on earth during Cain's life would be a rather close relative to Abel, but it's most likely that one of his own sons would try to repay Cain for what he did. Cain's remark then very well could be his fear of this.

Despite his murder, we see a great demonstration of the LORD's mercy. In order to protect him, the Lord said "... whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold." And the LORD set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him."

The mark placed on Cain is different from other marks placed on people later in the Bible. The word for "mark" is *owth*, which means a "sign."

This was a visible mark and a sign to anyone who would attempt to kill him. If they did, they would receive vengeance seven-fold, or "completely." There would be no mercy given for the murderer of this murderer.

Once the sentence was pronounced, we finish off with the verse that says he "went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden." The word *Nod* means "wandering" and this fulfills the sentence given by the Lord – that he would be a vagabond and a wanderer.

We can look to the Bible for modern parallels too. Cain went "East of Eden" the place where the presence of the Lord is. On the east side of Eden is where the cherubim were placed to guard access to the garden. But in a symbolic parallel, Jerusalem is where the Temple stood; the place where God dwelt.

Babylon, where Iraq is today, is east of Jerusalem and it is the city which is biblically in spiritual opposition to Jerusalem. When the Israelites disobeyed God, they were sent eastward, to Babylon for the duration of their punishment. Today, this same area is a stronghold of the muslim empire,

and is the key force against both the restored people of Israel and the people of God in Christ.

On a greater level though, Babylon is the symbol of all false religions and spiritual opposition to the truth of the gospel. There is a spiritual battle – the battle of ungodly Cain and godly Abel – going on even to this day in the unseen world around us.

The sad story we read in Genesis 4 will only be completely behind us when Satan is finally cast into the Lake of Fire. Until then, human wickedness and the forces of the devil will continue to fight against the truth of God and His word, which are received by faith and demonstrated in offerings of faith by the people of God.

Life East of Eden

Eve was elated – a son to undo this mess
Look at the deed that I have done!!!
It was me who did it... and the LORD too, I guess
With the Lord I have acquired a son

Life will be great and life will be fun
Back to life under the heavens, no more life under the sun

“Oh no” cried Eve, another boy to feed, life is just a breath
I guess I’m stuck here under the sun
His name is Abel, he’s no conquer of death
It’s all so meaningless... my hopes are undone

I’m Cain and from my tilling I’ll give God a slice
I’m going to buy His favor with my stuff
My name is Abel and I tend the flocks, they are so nice
But even the choicest and the best is not enough

I’m so pleased with your offering of faith young Abel
I will bless you with abundance at your table

But Cain what you've given wasn't from your heart
I think you'd better go and make a brand new start

Cain murdered his brother and was cursed from the earth
And set the example for an unrighteous soul
Instead of eternal hope from a new birth
His life ended under the devil's control

Cain spent his years as a vagabond in the land
Wandering aimlessly and without a hope
Instead of fruits and grains, he was left with barren sand
All because Cain was a faithless dope

But God had mercy even on that murderous wretch
He gave him a mark to protect his life
As he wandered for a very long stretch
A man cursed from the earth, a man of strife

Will you be like Cain and follow the devil?
Losing your soul, your most valuable part
Or like Abel will you be on the level
And in Jesus Christ, make a brand new start

Come to fountain and drink waters of life
Eat of the manna offered freely to all
Set aside your life of toil and strife
On the name of Jesus it's time for you to call

Just so you know before I finish, Cain was given a mark to protect his earthly life, but for those who call on Jesus, the last chapter of the Bible says we too will have a mark. This mark will be on our foreheads and it will be the very name of God – an eternal reminder that we have been purchased by the most precious substance in the universe – the blood of Jesus Christ.

And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴ They shall see His face, and His name *shall be* on their foreheads. Revelation 22:3, 4

Next week we'll look at Genesis 4:17-26 – The line of Cain. Take a couple minutes tonight and read those verses and meditate on them throughout the week.