

Genesis 4:1-26
Psalm 143
1 John 3

“East of Eden”

April 5, 2009

The story of Cain and Abel is mentioned twice in the gospels,
and four times in the epistles – twice in Hebrews, once in Jude,
and here in 1 John 3.

John uses the story of Cain and Abel as a moral lesson:

*We should not be like Cain, who was of the evil one and murdered his brother.
And why did he murder him?*

Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous.

Last time we heard God's promise that he would put enmity
between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

John says that Cain was of the evil one –
he was the seed of the serpent
as he imitated his father, the devil.

John says in 3:10

*By this it is evident who are the children of God,
and who are the children of the devil:
whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God,
nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

The one who has been born of God is God's seed,
and therefore the one who is born of God practices righteousness.

You may hear this and be tempted to despair!

But take heart, as John says,

*“By this we shall know that we are of the truth
and reassure our heart before him;
for whenever our heart condemns us,
God is greater than our heart, and he knows everything.”*

God knows your heart.

You cannot hide from him!

So stop trying to hide!

You cannot make yourself “look good” to God.

Our corruption reaches to every part of us.

And we learn this from the story of Cain and Abel.

Genesis 3 shows us that Adam and Eve sinned.

That's bad.

But Genesis 4 shows us that this sin has already become a human characteristic.

And sin gets worse.

Genesis 4 is a demonstration of the doctrine of original sin.

Original sin has two parts:
guilt and corruption.

We are guilty in Adam.
We are corrupt in Adam.

1. Adam Knew His Wife: Being Fruitless and Divisive (4:1-16)

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.

This starts off somewhat promising:

It sounds like Adam and Eve are being fruitful and multiplying.

But the name of their second son suggests that something is not quite right.

It is somewhat curious that most translations will have a footnote
saying that Cain’s name sounds like the Hebrew for “gotten” –
but they don’t bother saying what Abel’s name means!

Abel (or hebel) means “breath” or “vanity.”

It is the word used in Ecclesiastes 1 –

Vanity, vanity, everything is vanity.

Think about what this does for the one listening to the opening of Ecclesiastes:

Abel, Abel, everything is Abel.

Everything is but a breath that passes away.

Why is he named Abel?

We do not know Adam and Eve’s rationale –

but certainly Abel passes away like a breath.

He has no children, but dies in futility.

The vanity of life under the sun was demonstrated already in Genesis 4.

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.

We are told that Abel brought of the firstborn of his flock.

But Cain simply bring “an offering” –

suggesting that he did not bring the firstfruits,
but just whatever.
Because he fails in his theology, he will fail in his ethics.

The whole of human history demonstrates that if your theology is askew,
then your whole life will be oriented in the wrong direction.
I'm not talking about minor details of whether the Lutherans or the Reformed
have a better understanding of the Lord's Supper.

No, I'm talking about *who God is, how humanity has fallen into sin,
and how God has delivered us from sin and death
through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.*

Abel gets this.
He knows that his only hope is that God will do something to save him.

But Cain doesn't get this.
He wants to look religious – so he goes through the motions –
but he will not bring the first (the best) of his harvest.

*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.*

Notice that the LORD has regard *for Abel* and his offering.
The worshipper and his offering cannot be separated.
Already we begin to see that Cain and Abel represent to the two seeds:
the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman.

But notice what happens.
The failure of right worship reveals a fundamental problem:
Cain doesn't care what God says.
If he did, he would have brought a better sacrifice.
If Cain believed God's promises, and loved the LORD his God,
then when he realized that his offering was insufficient,
he would have gone back and done it right!
But Cain doesn't care about God – he could care less about what is right.

And so his failure to worship God in the way that God commanded
is merely the first step.

*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?"*

God even says to him, "try again" – I am a gracious and merciful God.

I will accept you and your offering, if you worship me as I command!

And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.

The image here is of a vicious animal (perhaps a serpent) lying in wait.

God warns him of his peril in similar language to what he had said to the woman:

Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it.”

As we saw last time, this word for “desire” is primarily sexual in nature,
but as Genesis will show repeatedly,

sex and power are woven together.

“Its desire is for you” reflects the sort of power that comes with sexual intimacy.

Why do we say that unmarried people should not have sex
(or even be “involved” sexually)?

God says not to.

That’s true – but why?

At least in part because sex and power are so woven together.

Adam says in Genesis 2 that the two shall become one flesh.

Sure, there is an emotional component to that,

but the physical bond of sex is itself powerful.

Why do you suppose people talk about “losing control”?

And here Genesis says that sin desires you.

Sin desires that overmastering control –
but you must rule over it.

Or to put it another way:

“Resist the devil and he will flee from you”

But Cain does not resist.

8 Cain spoke to Abel his brother.

And when they were in the field,

Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.

Why did Cain kill his brother?

Because God had accepted Abel’s offering, and not his own.

But Cain cannot strike down God.

All he can do is destroy the image of God.

All hatred, all murder, is an expression of man’s hatred for God.

Within the first generation after the fall,

sin has reached its logical conclusion:

I cannot kill God, so I will kill my brother, who is made in the image of God.

9 Then the Lord said to Cain,

“Where is Abel your brother?”

He said, “I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?”

Adam was commanded to guard the garden.
He failed, and now the cherubim stand guard.
The same word is used here,
as Cain asks, “am I my brother's guardian?”

Adam failed to guard the garden from an outsider.
Cain fails to guard his brother – but now the guard has become the assassin!

10 And the Lord said, “What have you done? (The same question asked of Eve)

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.”

Notice that it is not the voice of Abel that cries out from the ground,
but the voice of Abel's *blood*.
All throughout the scripture, the shedding of innocent blood taints the land.
Even when there is no witness,
the LORD himself sees.

And so the faithful judge renders judgment:
“You are cursed from the ground” – Cain had worked the ground,
but now he is alienated from it.

And God proclaims him a fugitive and wanderer –
alienated not only from the ground, but also from his family.

13 Cain said to the Lord, “My punishment is greater than I can bear. [\[5\]](#)

*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.”*

There is no repentance here.

Only further anger at the judgment against him.

Cain did not seem to care that his brother had no keeper – no guardian!
The murderer now whines and complains that no one will watch out for him!

Sin separates us from God,
and yet the sinner can never escape from his accountability to God.

But some have wondered why Cain is afraid that someone will kill him.
After all, who else is around?
We only hear the names of three of Adam and Eve's children,
but Adam is 130 when Seth is born,
so there has been more than a century
for children and grandchildren to be born.

No doubt there were several brothers who would have been quite upset at the fratricide.

But God has mercy:

*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.
16 Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord and settled in the land of Nod, [\[6\]](#)
east of Eden.*

God has mercy even upon a murderer.
He does not insist on exact judgment – at least not immediately!
But even as God had cast Adam and Eve out of the garden,
so now God sends Cain forth from his presence,
and he settles east of Eden.

And whereas God had condemned him to being a wanderer,
instead Cain builds a city.
The story of the whole Bible is the movement from the Garden to the City.
And the whole problem is that man insists on trying to pre-empt God.

We keep thinking that we know better than he does.
You might think that one of these days we would learn!
But such is the derrangement that has come about through sin
that we keep thinking that we can get around God.

2. Cain Knew His Wife: Dominion Run Amok (4:17-24)

*17 Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch.
When he built a city,
he called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch.
18 To Enoch was born Irad,*

*and Irad fathered Mehujael,
and Mehujael fathered Methushael,
and Methushael fathered Lamech.*

There is actually some question as to whether Cain built this city,
or whether the “he” is Enoch,
in which case Enoch named the city after *his* son, Irad.

What would make this particularly interesting is that “Irad” or “Eridu”
is the name of the first city given in the Babylonian Epic.
The genealogies in Genesis regularly connect with the surrounding nations,
and so it could well be that Genesis is showing
how the stories of the surrounding nations
are rooted in the history of God’s dealings with humanity.

*19 And Lamech took two wives.
The name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.*

This is the first mention of polygamy –
and it comes in the context of the cursed line of Cain.
But don’t read too much into that,
because the line of Cain is also the one that comes up
with all the new technologies.

*20 Adah bore Jubal;
he was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock.
21 His brother's name was Jubal;
he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe.
22 Zillah also bore Tubal-cain;
he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron.
The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.*

What we are supposed to see is that both parts of God’s blessing to Adam
have become twisted to selfish ends.
We were supposed to be fruitful and multiply,
but while Lamech succeeds “biologically” in propagating his name,
he twists God’s appointed pattern of monogamy for his own selfish gain.

And the end result is that we are fruitless and divisive.

Likewise, we were supposed to have dominion over the earth,
but instead this dominion is perverted to selfish ends.

How should we think about this gifted pagans in Genesis 4 –
these sons of Lamech?

One thing to remember is that before God gave us these tasks,
he himself engaged in crafting and tilling.

And he created us in his image, and so we mirror back his likeness.

He is the true craftsman.

Every time you build something you are reflecting God's craftsmanship.

He is the true gardener.

Every time you plant something you are imitating his gardening.

Every time you design something you are imitating the great Designer.

Every time you manage a project you are reflecting the great Organizer.

All of your daily labors are a reflection of your God.

Which also means that every time you use these gifts sinfully,
you are mocking him.

The line of Cain introduces these technologies,

but because they do not acknowledge God or worship him,

they twist their abilities for their own perverse desires.

Be fruitful and multiply has now become self-serving through polygamy.

Having dominion over the earth has also become self-serving

as the father of technology and music uses power to glorify himself.

23 Lamech said to his wives:

"Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;

you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:

I have killed a man for wounding me,

a young man for striking me.

24 If Cain's revenge is sevenfold,

then Lamech's is seventy-sevenfold."

I should point out that throughout the Five Books of Moses,

a poem usually brings a particular narrative to its conclusion,

and then is followed by a brief epilogue.

We saw this in chapter 2 with Adam's poem about woman.

We saw this in chapter 3 with God's poem about the curse.

We now see it again in chapter 4 with Lamech's poem about Lamech's revenge.

Cain's revenge was sevenfold –

expressing the fullness of revenge.

Lamech's revenge is seventy-sevenfold,

expressing the absurdity of revenge.

I say absurdity for a reason:

Jesus says that we are to forgive our brother 77 times (or seventy time seven – Mt 18:22).

The parallel is intentional.

Just as Lamech raises revenge to its absurd conclusion,
so also Jesus raises forgiveness to an absurd conclusion.

(After all, if you are keeping track of enough offenses to reach 77
there is something seriously wrong with you!)

3. Adam Knew His Wife Again: (Hope in the End) Another Seed (4:25-26)

*25 And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth,
for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel,
for Cain killed him."*

*26 To Seth also a son was born,
and he called his name Enosh.*

At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.

In the days of Enosh (whose name can mean either 'man' or 'weak')
people began to call upon the name of Yahweh.

What does it mean to "call upon the name of the LORD"?

In Genesis 13 and 26 Abraham and Isaac build altars
and call on the name of the LORD.

Elijah will call on the name of the LORD at Mt. Carmel,
when he offers the sacrifices.

In the Psalms, calling on the name of the LORD
is always associated with worship and sacrifice (99, 105, 116).

So to call on the name of the LORD is to engage in public worship.

So while the Cainites are building cities and technologies,
(and demonstrating that they are the seed of the serpent)
the Sethites are worshiping God.

I'd like to close by pointing out that the two people in our chapter today
who are said to have pleased God
are Abel (vapor)
and Enosh (weakness).

Vapor and Weakness are the highlight of our story today!
The way of salvation will be the way of weakness.