

GENESIS 4:1–16

“THE RIGHTEOUS AND THE WICKED”

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 for you, but you must rule over it." 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." 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. ¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The story of Cain and Abel is a preview of human history. It is a preview of how Christ will destroy the devil and a preview of how the righteous will be persecuted by the wicked (i.e. the church persecuted by the antichrist). Since the fall of Adam and Eve, human history has been a conflict between the righteous and the wicked. After the fall, God divided humanity into two groups: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15). The part of the human race that continues on the side of the serpent is the seed of the serpent. The part of the human race that is renewed by the Spirit is the seed of the woman, the children of God.

The two groups belong to two opposing kingdoms: the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the devil. Those two kingdoms are at war with each other. God initiated that war by putting enmity/conflict between them (Gen 3:15). This war between the two kingdoms will not go on forever because arising from the seed of the woman will be a champion-warrior, the messianic Redeemer, who crushes the head of the serpent with his bruised heel. The bruising of his heel refers to his suffering and death through which he destroys the devil and delivers us from

bondage (cf. Heb 2:14–15). It is by shedding his blood that the Redeemer conquers Satan. Likewise, the rest of the woman’s offspring conquer Satan “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev 12:11).

The division of humanity into two opposing groups took place with the first descendants of Adam and Eve: Cain and Abel. Cain is the firstborn; Abel is his younger brother. God chose the younger brother and rejected Cain. That foreshadows other similar stories in the Old Testament, such as Jacob and Esau. God chose Jacob, the younger one, and rejected Esau. “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Rom 9:13). The mystery of God’s purpose of election is already at work in Genesis 4 with the choice of Abel and rejection of Cain.

The conflict between Cain and Abel, which resulted in Abel’s death, is part of the conflict between the two seeds. It is the first battle between the two kingdoms. Cain is the wicked seed of the serpent; Abel, the righteous seed of the woman. It may appear that this first battle ended in victory for the kingdom of the devil, since it resulted in Abel’s death. However, Abel is the victor, not Satan. It is through death that the champion-seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. Abel’s death is a preview of Christ’s victory over Satan. Abel’s death foreshadows the triumphant death of Christ through which he vanquished the devil. In this initial conflict between the two kingdoms, Abel is not conquered by the devil. He conquers the devil “by the blood of the Lamb,” for he loved not his life “even unto death” (Rev 12:11).

Abel is the first righteous martyr whose death bears witness to the death of Christ, which destroys the devil. Abel’s death foreshadows the death of Christ through which the woman’s offspring gains permanent and definitive victory over Satan and his kingdom. Abel foreshadows Christ. He is a type of the Good Shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep (cf. John 10:11). Abel’s death bears witness to the death of Christ. It is a prophetic sign of it. The story of Cain and Abel preenacts the decisive battle in which the champion seed of the woman destroys the devil. But it is also a preview of the persecution of the righteous by the wicked or, put differently, the persecution of the church by the antichrist.

Cain is the first antichrist figure in history. Through Cain, Satan attempts to destroy the seed of the woman. It is Satan’s first attempt to do so, but it will by no means be his last (cf. Rev 12–13). What Satan attempted and failed to accomplish through the wicked hands of Cain, he will again later attempt and fail to accomplish through the wicked hands of the unbelieving Jews. The devil was a murderer from the beginning, and his children, like Cain and the unbelieving Jews in the Gospels, follow his example. Jesus said to the unbelieving Jews, **“You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies”** (John 8:44).

The unbelieving Jews who murdered Jesus were of their father the devil; they were the seed of the serpent. So was Cain. He was of his father the devil, and his will was to do the will of his

father. And what was the will of his father? to destroy the seed of the woman. Through Cain, Satan caused Abel to suffer to the point of death in an attempt to devour the woman's offspring (cf. Rev 12:4). Abel's death foreshadows, first and foremost, the suffering and death of Christ but also the suffering of all who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake" (Matt 5:10). Abel is the first to be persecuted for the sake of righteousness. He is the first righteous martyr.

The occasion of Satan's first attempt to devour the seed of the woman was Cain and Abel's worship at the foot of God's holy mountain. 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.**

Cain and Abel appear before the LORD at the gate of his garden-temple, the closed gate of the garden of Eden (Gen 3:24). Although Adam and Eve had been driven out of the garden, they were still living in the precincts of Eden. They were encamped at the foot of God's holy mountain. Cain and Abel presented their offerings to the LORD at the entrance of his garden-temple. Since Abel drew near to God in faith, trusting in the fulfillment of his promise of redemption (Gen 3:15), God accepted Abel and his offering (Gen 4:4). But since Cain did not draw near to God through faith in the coming Redeemer, God rejected Cain and his offering (Gen 4:5).

That made Cain furious. His anger erupted at the altar of God. He "was very angry, and his face fell" (Gen 4:5). Cain's anger toward God betrayed his kinship to the devil. Cain was at enmity with God. He did not love God but despised him. He was angry with God because he thought that God had wrongfully rejected his offering. Cain thought that God was unrighteous and had treated him unjustly. God's rejection of Cain's offering triggered his hostility toward God and toward his brother, righteous Abel.

Cain's hostility, which betrayed his kingship to Satan, is what Satan used as the occasion for his attempt to devour the woman's offspring. But God warned Cain ahead of time that that was going to happen. 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 for you, but you must rule over it."** God warns Cain that sin, personified here like a vicious dragon/Satan, is crouching at the door and is ready to pounce on him and devour him (cf. 1 Pet 5:8). But Cain can overcome him. He can rule over him by the blood of the Lamb (cf. Rev 12:11).

Cain, however, rejected God's warning. He refused to repent. He stopped his ears and hardened his heart. ⁸ **Cain spoke to Abel his brother. And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him.** Abel's death is the first human death in history. God purposed that the first human death would foreshadow the decisive death through which the one who had the power of death would be destroyed (Heb 2:14).

When God confronted Cain over his sin, Cain again betrayed his kinship to the devil by denying responsibility and lying to God (cf. John 8:44). ⁹ **Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"** Cain feels no remorse for his wicked deed. He has no fear of God or love for God. And does not regret his actions. Cain thinks that he is righteous and God is unjust.

But God, the righteous Judge of all the earth, hears the cry of Abel's blood and has come to avenge him. ¹⁰ **And the LORD said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.** The blood of the righteous martyrs cries out to God from the ground (cf. Matt 23:35; Rev 6:10). It cries out for justice, for vengeance. We see a stark contrast here between the blood of Abel and the blood of Jesus. The blood of Jesus speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Heb 12:24). Abel's blood speaks a word of condemnation; it condemns Cain. It is the ground of God's judicial sentence against Cain. Abel's blood intensifies the curse on Cain. But Christ's blood speaks a word of justification; it justifies us. It is the ground of God's judicial sentence of justification. It removes the curse of eternal death and brings the blessing of eternal life.

But the blood of Abel called for Cain's condemnation. And God cursed Cain because of Abel's death. 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."** Cain responds to this curse with self-pity, not remorse or repentance. Cain fears that someone will take vengeance on him because of his murder of Abel. 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."**

God promised to protect Cain and establishes a means through which Cain will be protected, which, as we will see is the common state. 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, east of Eden.**

The story of Cain and Abel is a preview of human history. It is a preview of how Christ gains victory over Satan. And it is a preview of how the righteous are persecuted by the wicked or, put differently, how the church is persecuted by the antichrist. The story of Cain and Abel shows us what we are to expect as followers of Christ. We should expect to suffer at the hands of the world. The Apostle John teaches this when he writes, ¹² 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. ¹³ Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you (1John 3:12–13). Don't be surprised if the world hates you. It has been that way from the beginning. And that state of affairs will continue until Christ returns.