

Birth Pains

Sin Spreads to the Human Family

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.

Genesis 4:1-16 ESV

Cain ain't Abel

Why didn't Cain love his brother? Because he wasn't Abel. This joke is about human depravity, a significant theme of our story. The story of Cain and Abel is known the whole world over. It is one of the most basic stories in the world. It is still in our public consciousness. It is in urban slang: "Raising Cain." It was most recently portrayed humorously (and blasphemously) in the movie

Year One (2009). We must not take a blasphemous or cavalier approach to this extremely important story. But we must also not be overly simplistic about it, either. We want to read it in its context so that we can understand the depth and genius and application of it. Today we are going to focus on this story as we find it in **Genesis 4:1-16**.

First, I want to look at **why it is here**. To do this, I want to compare a few elements of this story with things we have seen in the first three chapters. In doing this, it will become apparent that this story does not stand on its own, like one of Aesop's Fables, but is woven from the same cloth as these chapters. Indeed, together they begin to show us a great and terrible tapestry.

Consider the following related points (see chart):

Genesis 1-3 and 4 Compared	
God tells Eve she will bear children (3:16)	Eve now bears two sons: Cain and Abel (4:1-2)
Man is told to work the ground (2:5; 16)	Cain works the ground (4:2)
Man is told to have dominion over the animals (1:26, 28)	Abel, a shepherd, has dominion over his flock (4:2)
This ground is also a temple (Gen 1-2) and temples are for worship	Worship is essential to the story of Cain and Abel (4:3-4)
In the temple, sacrifices and offerings are presented (Gen 3:21)	Cain and Abel offer sacrifices and offerings at the door [of the Eden-temple?] (4:3-7).
God promised Eve that in pain she would bring forth children (3:16)	Her oldest child is a great pain (4:5ff)
Satan tempts Eve (3:1-5)	Sin is crouching as a demon over Cain (4:7)
God comes to Adam and Eve (3:7ff)	God comes to Cain (4:6-7; 9ff.)
God says the woman will desire the man / he must rule over her (3:16)	God says sin desires Cain, Cain must rule over it (4:7) (LXX "sin" is "him" rather than "it": Hast thou not sinned if thou hast brought it rightly, but not rightly divided it? be still, to thee shall be <u>his</u> submission, and thou shalt rule over <u>him</u> .)
Adam and Eve have sinned and sin needs atonement (3:6, 21)	Sin is at the heart of Cain's offering (4:5-7) and so he needs atonement
Adam and Eve's sin brings death (2:17)	Cain's sin brings death (4:8)
Adam and Eve cover themselves with the leaves of a fruit tree (3:7)	Cain offers a fruit offering to God (4:3)
Atonement is covered by the animal (3:21)	Abel offers an animal, and the best of his sacrifice (4:4).
When man works the ground, the ground is cursed (3:19)	Cain is cursed from the ground (4:11-12).
Adam and Eve are driven away (3:24)	Cain is driven away (4:14)
Temples have doors to the east (3:24), meaning that to enter them, you have to go west	Cain goes east of Eden (4:16)

That is a lot of overlap for such a few short verses. Surely, they are not accidental. Together, they help explain why this story is here and what the different aspects of each story ultimately mean as they mutually interpret one another. Let me

summarize this in three main points. **First**, the story demonstrates that in fact the curse and judgment of Genesis 3 extends beyond Adam and Eve. From the very beginning of their attempts to start a family, sin has dominated the great human family. We have not mastered it; it, or perhaps “he” has mastered us. **Second**, the story does not leave us in depravity, but teaches us that there is the possibility of atonement for our sin, and it teaches us how that atonement is possible. This is the essence of what makes it a biblical, rather than a purely moral story. **Third**, the story points beyond itself to a time in the future, a time we find ourselves living in today. A time of salvation and grace in Jesus Christ. As we make our way through these three points, we will see the great biblical progression from law to gospel.

Birth Pains: Human Depravity

A Promising Start

It all starts with such hope and promise. God told Eve that she would have a seed, and that this seed would crush the head of the serpent. Vs. 1 seems like it may be the fulfillment of that promise. “**Eve conceives and bares Cain**” (**Gen 4:1**). It says that she recognizes him as a “**man**” (as opposed to an infant or a boy). Perhaps Cain is the man who will crush the devil’s head? Contrary to heretical beliefs about Eve and the Serpent, or even Eve and Yahweh, it says that “**Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.**” Adam is Cain’s father. Cain is fully human, and this fact has great implications on what it means to be a human after the fall.

It says Adam “**knew**” (*yada*) his wife. This refers to the **intimacy** of their marriage, the physical encounter that produces offspring. The word is wonderful and profound, for it teaches us that sex is not purely biological, as if mankind are brute animals procreating out of instinct. Rather, the encounter is **deeply personal**, the core of the marriage relationship.

Curiously, the same word is used for foreknowledge in the NT. This is God’s “knowledge” of us in choosing and electing his own.¹ It is a setting of love upon someone. Listen to the intimacy and exclusivity of the term as God uses for Israel—His wife, “**You only have I known (*yada*) of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities**” (**Amos 3:2**). There is nothing more sacred than this kind of knowledge. Marital intimacy is a type that demonstrates the kind of love that God has for all those he has effectually called

¹ The NT equivalent is “foreknow” (*proginosko*; Rom 8:29). See James Montgomery Boice, *Romans: The Reign of Grace*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991–), 921-23.

to himself. Stopping to consider such a thing, whether you are single or married, ought to bring you great joy if you have faith in Jesus Christ.

As will become typical in Genesis, Cain's will be named something relating to the story, something important to the parents, something that foreshadows redemptive history. The meaning usually comes in the expression that follows. Eve says, "I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD" (Gen 4:1). Cain means something like "possess" or "acquire." She has acquired the man. In my opinion, this is the counterpart to Adam's naming of Eve, meaning "life" (3:20).

Adam showed faith after the fall by naming Eve and beginning his rule, for to name something is to rule over it. He also showed faith in the name that he gave her, for he demonstrated that he had hope for life after the judgment of God. Eve seems to demonstrate the same hope, this time based on that promise of the Seed. She would give birth to a man that would crush the head of the serpent. It is a beautiful display of belief in action, brought about through faith in the promise and God's covering her with the skins of the animal. If all you knew was this verse of the story, there would be no reason not to think this. God is going to bring deliverance from the power of sin and Satan.

Eve is not done becoming a new mother. She has a second son and his name will be "Abel" (*habel*; Gen 4:2. The Geneva Bible has Habel). Abel is a prophetic name, probably meaning "breath; vanity; vapor." If you were a Jewish child hearing this story for the first time, you would understand the meaning of the name and you would probably ask, "Why would she name him this?" Thus, both names set up the great irony and twist of the story. "Vanity of vanities (*habel habalim*). All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" Cain will not be the man, but will cut Abel's breath short by striking him in a field, murdering him in cold blood. Then *poof*, like a vapor he disappears and is gone.

From the very beginning, in the names and then the story, God is going to show humanity that the promise will come about his way, not theirs. His ways are higher than ours. No one can scrutinize them or figure them out. They seem backwards to us. In this story, it is not Cain—the oldest—that will be the hero. But the younger is God's chosen, the one who will be persecuted and who will die for his faith and works in devotion to Yahweh. The older will serve the younger. And both men will point forward to the need for someone greater.

Anatomy of Sin

Adam and Eve fade from the scene, and Cain, Abel, and Yahweh become the actors on the stage. What I want to do now is begin to unravel the mysterious workings of sin in the life of Cain. The overarching theme of this story, it seems to me, is how sin and its consequences spread to all of humanity. This is directly related to the judgment of God upon Satan, Eve, and Adam. What it does is unfolds the anatomy of sin.

Jesus' half-brother James tells us summarizes how sin operates. "Each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death. Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers" (James 1:14-16). In this you can see two distinct things. First, there is a kind of order to the birth of sin. The order is part of its subtlety and deception. Second, you can hear how speaks of sin as if it has a mind of its own. Let's look at how the same thing unfolds in Genesis 4.

It starts so innocently. Sin usually does. Always remember that. Sin does not immediately clobber a person on the head. First it has to woo them into a field. Abel is a keeper of sheep. Cain is a worker of the ground. Some people think the problem begins here, as if Abel was doing the noble, sacred work, while Cain's vocation was rebellious and sinful. As if farming were akin to something like prostitution? Others think there is irony here, that Cain is doing what God wanted him to do, and for some reason unrelated to the story, Abel's shepherding is random and out of place. The fact is, both vocations are exactly within the confines of carrying out the dominion mandate. Man was given the task of tending the ground (Gen 2:5, 16). He was also given the task of having dominion over the animals (1:26-28). No, the problem does not originate in the work itself, but in a confusion of the vocation and religious duty that will be discussed next.

I use the word "vocation" rather than job, because vocation presupposes some kind of relationship to God. It comes from a Latin word meaning to call (*voco*). A vocation is a calling of work from God. But today, as in the days of old, some people are under the impression that the only work that pleases God is religious work, work of "ministry." This unbiblical idea sometimes asserts itself through the idea that if you work as a secular accountant, secretary, teacher, or whatever, that God is not pleased with this work, but, if you do the same work for a religious institution then God is pleased with it. This is a confusion of realms and duties within each. Vocation is relating to God in the physical/natural realm; religion is a relating to God by being lifted up into the spiritual realm. Yes, religion takes place on earth in the body, but something mystical happens in it, where the invisible,

spiritual part of the universe comes to the forefront. This is something that I believe got Cain into trouble too, though it is speculative on my part. This is the point at which his passions began to drag him away and entice him. “Passion,” as it was used in biblical days, refers not to “emotions,” which can be good or not good, but to those negative aspects of our fallen flesh. Passions are never good. They are vices that must be conquered by virtues.

What do I mean, and why do I think this about Cain? The reason is that after introducing their means of gainful employment (**vs. 2**), the subject immediately switches to **religion**, particularly in bringing offerings and sacrifices to God (**vv. 3-4**). If the earth is a temple (Gen 1), and Eden is God’s holy residence (2), then we need to understand how to worship. That is why Genesis 4 uses false worship as its entrance sin in the story, a sin that leads to a host of others. The clincher is, the **sacrifices** of each man **match his vocation**. Cain works the ground and brings to God an offering of the fruit of the ground (3). Abel is a shepherd and brings the firstborn of his flock and of the fat portions (4). The idea seems to be that each should bring a representation of his work as a sacrifice to God. And this is the temptation. This is where Cain’s passion got the better of him.

Hear this next sentence clearly. *There is nothing inherently wrong with the idea*. It is no more inherently wrong to offer grain to God than it is to be a farmer. If you read the laws of sacrifices and offerings carefully, you will see that Israel was commanded and allowed to bring both bloody animals and fat to God as well as offerings of the fruit of the earth. The word for Cain’s offering is a *minchah*, and it is elaborated positively in Leviticus 2. It is the law of the grain offering.

A **problem** is introduced in **4b-5**, but the problem does not originate in the vocation. It originates in the setting and the purpose the men were coming to God with offerings for in the first place. But sin is a subtle deceiver, and even we who have the Spirit are often unable to see exactly where the deception begins, and this is exactly what makes it so dangerous. Even usually solid commentaries do not seem to understand this point, and thus they lead the reader astray in a story whose purpose is exactly the opposite: to teach us about right and wrong. Yet, we get utterly confused on what is right and what is wrong in this story.²

² Westerman (who is more Liberal, but is usually pretty good and at least noticing the context) writes, “The meaning of Cain’s reaction is clear; it does not seem to require any explanation. Nevertheless this sentence, which is a climactic point in the narrative, is generally misunderstood. Typical is a remark of A. Dillmann: ‘(Cain) shows by means of his countenance that his spirit hitherto had not been in the right direction.’ Cain then, according to this interpretation, must have been resentful beforehand; the murder of his brother shows how resentful a man he was. But this is to put the event described in the narrative completely out of focus.

But if commentaries are confused, the text is not. Notice that it says there is a two-fold problem with Cain and a two-fold regarding with Abel. It says, “The LORD had regard for Abel and his offering” (4b). Then it says, “But for Cain and his offering he had no regard.” Some people think that if the problem was not Cain’s offering, it must have been his heart. He was not sincere, they say. This creates an either/or logical fallacy.³ Others sometimes act as if the only problem was the offering. Both are true. There was a problem with both Cain and his offering. There was not a problem with either Abel or his offering. Unless we see both, sin has already deceived us, for the either/or dichotomy logically leads to worship that is outward and rote where the heart does not matter, or to worship that is (supposedly) sincere, but disobedient.⁴ Neither is good.

I can’t tell you how many times I have heard people say that Reformed worship is dead orthodoxy. They say it about our own worship service. To say that is to ironically judge people’s heart, and this often starts with this logical fallacy. If all God cares about is the heart, then why would anyone do something so outdated, so not fun, so difficult, so culturally irrelevant? Their hearts *must* be cold as ice. Have you ever been guilty of judging outward worship like this? On the other hand, being so concerned with doing the right thing often tempts people to give up the heart. How many people think that if they just go to church and show up that God will be pleased? As if he doesn’t care about or see our hearts?⁵ Oh the wicked

Cain’s reaction is normal and justified; without reason he is disadvantaged and rejected. His outburst and his sullenness are the corresponding reactions. One must be clear that the narrator is not thinking of an individual or in terms of individual ethic but is concerned with human existence in common. It is only thus that one really comes to terms with the conflict which is rooted in the rejection and the reaction to it. When we speak here of ‘envy’ then we must modify our understanding of this word; it once had a positive meaning. The reaction to the rejection and disadvantage gives rise to a power which as such is primarily positive, and at least ethically neutral.” Claus Westermann, *A Continental Commentary: Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 297–298. In my opinion, this is pure nonsense, and is a basic failure to read the story with both what has come before it, and what we find in the NT about it.

³ B. K. Waltke, “Cain and His Offering,” *WTJ* 48 (Fall 1986) 363–372.

⁴ I suppose a person can think they are sincere in worship as they ignorantly worship in a way that is disobedient. But sometimes people separate sincerity and obedience so much that they actually think that they can be sincere while they are deliberately disobedient.

⁵ **GOING DEEPER:** Jesus told the woman at the well, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him” (John 4:23). Some have inferred from this not a new place of worship, but a new way of worship, that somehow prior to this coming hour, the Father did not care about worshipping God in a true or spiritual way. This is nonsense.

Nothing could be more foreign to the OT than to think that God does not care about worshipping him truly. All a person has to do is read the second half of Exodus, Leviticus, most of Numbers, and Deuteronomy to discover that God cares a whole lot about the true way of worship. In fact, maybe it is because he cares so *much* about it that it becomes so overwhelming that people won’t read these books on how God likes to be

perverse subtlety of sin to cause us to keep one good thing at the expense of another good thing and to cause us to think we are righteous as we do it.

There are two ways to see what the problems were. One is to go [backwards](#), back into Genesis 1-3. The other is to move [forward](#), particularly to the NT and its comments on this text. [Going backwards](#), using the context, reveals that the reason why Cain and Abel were coming to God was not merely to present offerings (like praise offerings or tithes), but to make atonement for their sin. How do I know this?

Think about how sin and death crescendo as we read the previous story. God predicts that when they eat the forbidden fruit, they will die. They eat it and God comes in judgment after being tempted by Satan. God judges and Adam and Eve so that they feel in profoundly harsh ways the effects of the curse of Satan and the ground. Then God kicks them out of the Garden of Eden. All of these things will be repeated in the story of Cain. This is intentional and deliberate, for Cain is a second Adam in his fall into sin.

God warns Cain of sins desire and impact ([4:7a](#)), just like God warned Adam that he would die. This warning takes the form of a repetition of the language he used in telling Cain about her desire for her husband and his need to ruler her. This specific verse says that [sin is crouching](#) at the [door](#). I believe the “door” here probably refers to the very [entrance of Eden](#), where the cherubim were placed, for the end of the story tells us that only after this Cain moves away from Eden.

If Eden is a temple, then this door corresponds to the door of the Holy Place in the tabernacle. The priest could not go through that door until he has washed and made atonement for his sin on the altar in the courtyard. This is the function of the offering. This was just shown in the previous story where Adam and Eve are

worshiped. Summarizing this, the OT asks rhetorically, “[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 listen than the fat of rams](#)” ([1 Sam 15:22](#)). The focus is on *doing* what is right.

Adding to this, it would probably be nothing less than complete abhorrence of the OT that would cause someone to conclude that God didn’t care about our hearts in worship prior to the coming of Christ. But David said, “[For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise](#)” ([Ps 51:16-17](#)). This passage does not contradict the former, but is rather focusing on the inner man, while the former focuses on the outer. You see, both matter to God. Indeed, they always have.

The catechism asks, “[What is the chief end of man?](#)” It answers, “[The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.](#)” To give glory to God is to worship God, the very thing we have come to do this morning as a church. “[Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness](#)” ([Ps 29:2](#)). Thus, if the catechism is right, it means that we exist for the purpose of worshiping God and enjoying him. Those are two sides of the same coin, the outer and inner coming together. This is not a means to a greater end. It is the end, as the question asks. It has been the end since the very beginning.

covered with the skins of the animal. This is clearly a sacrifice being offered by Yahweh (the Word/Son) to Yahweh (the Father). It covers their sin and the false coverings they made with the leaf of a fruit tree.

The word “**crouch**” is almost surely the word for a **demon** of the ancient world. He is called the *rabisu*, and he was known throughout the Ancient Near East. He was a **demon that lurked in shadows** to spring an ambush. There was a *rabisu* for just about everywhere a person could think of traveling (the roof, the river, the wasteland, the road, even the lavatory).⁶ This idea, of course, has close connection to Satan, a different evil spiritual being tempting Adam and Eve. It perhaps explains why sin is so often portrayed as a personal entity with a mind of its own.

So as we look back, we can see that the context is of sin and death becoming the greatest curse upon humanity, and the need for it to be overcome by someone. We think Cain will be the one to do it, but Cain ends up being not only as powerless as his parents, but his actions become *worse* than theirs. Sin spirals out of control, and we are only one generation into the human family. This theme will not stop here. It is only the beginning. The next chapters show just how bad death and violence and murder and sin will get.

It teaches this to us through the escalating nature of the anatomy of sin and then through the repetition of many more ideas we have already seen. Again, notice that God has no regard for Cain or his offering. **As to his offering**, he should have offered, as Reformed Christians have rightly taught, an offering to atone for sin. As Spurgeon said, “**When Cain and Abel had grown up, the only sacrifice that God could accept was the slain lamb.**”⁷ This was because sin had to be dealt with first. Hebrews teaches that only a blood offering can do this (**Heb 9:22**). For this reason Hebrews also tells us that **Abel’s sacrifice was better than Cain’s** (**Hebrews 11:4**). At this moment it is not speaking about his heart, but his sacrifice. Everything in Genesis 1-4 points to this as the inevitable conclusion, even though many miss it. Cain’s offering did not do what it needed to do, and so it was not accepted.

As to Cain himself, he was simply not a man of faith. He was of the “**evil one**” (**1 Jn 3:12**). This does now refer to his heart. We find this out quickly enough. First, he becomes **angry** (**Gen 4:5b**). It is not that his anger is somehow justified, because he didn’t do anything wrong (as some say), but rather that it is not justified because he did a good thing *at the wrong time*. He should have known better.

⁶ See “*rabisu*,” in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*.

⁷ C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 51 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1905), 426.

His good offering at the wrong time, on his terms, leads to anger. The timing is everything. The timing makes the good offering an unacceptable offering. Now is not the time for a tithe of what you have produced like a dutiful servant, but for atonement. Proper order is necessary. After atonement there can be a tithe. Abel's offering has both atonement and tithe, for God takes the fat as his portion, but the death of the animal covers Abel first.

The anger of Cain will be directed at his brother. Here is where it begins to escalate. God asks him *why his face is so downcast and why he has become angry* (6). Rather than let Cain answer, God tells him that he has to *master sin*. *Cain has sinned in what he has done*. Do not miss this. This is the teaching of God's words in *vs. 7*. Like his parents, he has to master it. We saw that Adam and Eve's reaction was one of faith, but how does Cain respond?

His anger at God ends up coming out at his brother—his *righteous* brother. Abel made him just as angry as God did. You see, the NT rightly teaches that Abel offered his sacrifice *by faith* (*Heb 11:4*). *The righteousness of Abel exposed the unrighteousness of Cain*. It is like turning on the lights and finding a dirty room. When wickedness is exposed by righteousness, wickedness get angry. It does not want to be seen for what it is, so it lashes out. This is what James is talking about. Cain was enticed by his own passions to worship God his own way, a way that could have been acceptable, but not at that point in time, and God calls him on it. This in turn causes greater sin to rise to the surface, like lava boiling through an open fissure. The temptation combined with his own passions gives birth to sin.

We all think of Cain's sin as being *murder*. He murders Abel (*Gen 4:8*). But there are many more sins than just murder. There is the root: *faithlessness*. Anything not done from faith is sin (*Rom 14:23*), even if it is a good thing outwardly, the heart is black. A wrong sacrifice was offered. This is implied *disobedience*, which is, of course, a sin. Now, Cain is clearly a religious man. But when a religious man is told that his religion is not acceptable, it sure has a way of making him furious. This is a major theme of the Bible, from Babel to the Kings of Israel to Ananias and Sapphira. The Apostle refers to it as "*will-worship*" (*Col 2:23*), and it is the heart of all false-worship. Oh, how too many of us Christians are full of will-worship. In fact, we probably all are. Will-worship has, at its heart, the pleasure of "me." It approaches God on my terms, on what makes me happy, on what I think God should like. It goes to worship for what I can get out of it.

There is more. Rather than humility and repentance, **anger** sprang up. Curiously, so also did **self-absorbed depression**. Cain began looking inward rather than outward. When he looked inward, his face fell, because in looking inward, all you can find is failure and rebellion. There is no hope here. Throughout history, Cain has been seen as the archetype of a plethora of sins: envy, greed, violence, lust, hatred, pride (**T. Benj. 7:5**; **1 Clement 4:7**; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.52-56). He is the great egoist (Philo, *Det.* 32, 78), and the leader of others into the ways of sin (Philo, *Post* 38-39; **Jude 11**).

With all this in mind, after murdering his brother, the LORD returns to Cain and asks him a question, just like he asked Adam a question. Cain has become the new Adam rather than the redeeming, conquering Seed. “**Where is Abel your brother?**” (9). Sin has a nasty way of multiplying and compounding. **First, he lies**, “**I do not know.**” Then he **shifts blame** (like Adam and Eve), “**Am I my brother’s keeper?**” This famous saying originates, not in Hollywood, but in the Bible. It is the perfect reflection of self-interpreted, subjective morality. “**I don’t consider myself to be responsible for being my brother’s guardian or caretaker, so I haven’t been watching him closely and I don’t know where he is.**” Yes, subjective morality has been around for a long, long time. Jesus teaches us that we are our brother’s keeper. Indeed, we are to love even our enemies, not just our neighbor.

God knows that Cain is a liar and a blame-shifter. **He questions Cain**, “**What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the ground**” (10). I will return to this verse in a moment. For now, I simply wish you to see that God knows. Even though Cain hides, God knows. Just as surely as your conscience knows when you sin and holds you in a prison in your mind and soul, God knows when you sin. He sees everything, every outward sin, every inward thought. He knows where your feet have been, what your hands have done, what your eyes have seen, what your mind has thought. Cain thought he could fool Yahweh. All unrepentant people think they can fool God. They are mistaken.

Then, as with Adam, **God judges Cain**. Notice the similarity in the judgment. “**Now you are cursed from the ground**” (**Gen 4:11**; cf. **Gen 3:17-19**). But the judgment is worse. With Adam, the **ground was cursed** and Adam had to suffer and toil. This time, **the man is cursed** and the ground suffers from his murder. The blood of the ground cries out. The ground will no longer yield its strength (**4:12**). The meaning is personal for Cain: farming will no longer work for him. This is part of the reason why he later becomes the builder of a city. Much later, God will actually

send Israel into captivity because it has sinned against the land, and it needs its *sabbath* rest just like man does.

The **ground** is personified as having **opened its mouth** to receive his brother's blood. It is a devouring monster. It personifies the terror that is death, death that comes because of sin. This language is used of Korah and his rebellious rabble. The ground opened its mouth and swallowed them alive (**Num 16:32**). In this way, both Cain and Korah become types of the evil one, religious wolves, wicked men who lead others astray. They are warnings of how we are not to behave. Jesus' other half-brother Jude tells us not to walk in the way of Cain (**Jude 1:11**).

God kicked Adam out of Eden, and now he curses Cain saying, **"You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth"** (**Gen 4:12**). Before this final sentence is carried out, Cain interrupts. **"My punishment is greater than I can bear"** (**13**). The next two verses are very strange in light of this point.

First, Cain adds that **it is beyond what he can bear** because not only is he being driven from his vocation as a farmer (**"driven me away from the ground"**), but because **"from your face I shall be hidden"** (**14**). For God to hide his face is for God's grace to be absent from a person. David says, **"Hide not your face from me. Turn not your servant away in anger, O you who have been my help. Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation!"** (**Ps 27:9**). One may want to imply that Cain is like David, and that he shows a glimmer of faith here. But Cain shows no sign of desiring salvation. Do you desire salvation? Rather, he reminds me of the pitiful king Saul or that traitor Judas. He is sorry, but it is not godly sorrow.

Instead, **the focus turns back on himself**. It is not that God's face is hidden and this means salvation is no longer near. Rather, it is that this means he **"shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me"** (**14b**). It is a turning back inward. Naval gazing. "Woe is me," not in repentance and faith like Isaiah, but as a kind of pitiable martyr-complex. Abel isn't the martyr, Cain is! Oh how wicked sin is, as it twists everything around to the exact opposite of reality.

This is not an unintentional murder such that he has a city of refuge to flee to. It is deliberate. Yet, God spares his life, even though later, in the law, such an act was to be punished with the death penalty. It is not entirely clear why Cain is worried about someone killing him. Maybe that is the reason? They will carry out the death sentence on him. This implies that many years have passed since Cain and Abel were born. Adam and Eve have had many other children, and they too have had children. This first family of the human race knew Cain, knew Abel, and such behavior would have been intolerable. You cannot live in such fear for long.

Verse 15 is even more inexplicable. It seems to me that God is showing Cain grace that he does not deserve. “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.” This “mark” has been the object of speculation for thousands of years. Some ancient Syriac and eastern Christians, as well as Mormons used to say God turned Cain into a black man, and that all black people bore the curse of Cain (racism if ever there was racism). Some have suggested God put horns on Cain’s head.⁸ Some have suggested it was a hair style.⁹ Others, that it was a tattoo, in line with a mark on the forehead (see esp. Ezek 9:4, 6).¹⁰

In coming to a theological understand of this mark, we need to see that the stated purpose is to protect Cain. It is not a curse, but an act of grace. For this reason, some have suggested that the mark was a dog God provided,¹¹ or was actually the city (with its protective walls) that Cain will build.¹² Whatever it was, its importance is related to both the way God treats Cain, and, as we will see next time, the story of Cain after he leaves Eden.

Perhaps the saddest part of the story is how it ends. “Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden” (Gen 4:16). Cain moves away from Eden. His direction is the opposite a person would take if they were going to a temple to offer a sacrifice. It is a willful, personal, deliberate choice of Cain’s, even if it comes from the judgment of God. Cain went away. Finally, there is a deep sense of irony and rebellion, for Cain “settles” in the land of Nod. “Nod” means “wandering.” Cain was to be a wanderer, but instead of that, he settles down and no longer wanders though he is in the land of wandering.

If you have come to know anything at all about sin in your own life, what you should come to see from this story is the essence of its perverted grip on us. The story of Cain is the story of hell itself: Ever increasing sin, no ability to repent in godly sorrow, and at every step—from the first sacrifice at the door to the willful putting down of roots in a place of rootlessness—wicked rebellion. And this is the story not of Cain, but of all the descendants of Adam and Eve. We are Cain.

⁸ This rabbinical interpretation may date to the 1st century.

⁹ See the discussion in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 109-10.

¹⁰ R. W. L. Moberly, “The Mark of Cain – Revealed at Last?,” *HTR* 100 (2007): 11-28. <http://dro.dur.ac.uk/4117/1/4117.pdf>.

¹¹ This is an old rabbinical interpretation.

¹² Joel N. Lohr, “So YHWH Established a Sign for Cain: Rethinking Genesis 4,15,” *ZAW* 121 (2009): 101-03. also John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 66.

Abel and the Future

But what about Abel? This isn't his story, is it? Well, in a sense it is. Abel dies, you know. Abel suffers the consequences of sin just as Cain did. But Abel did it in a different way. Abel, "Vanity," shows us in his name, how fleeting, how empty, and how ruthless are the passions of this world. But Abel shows us something more.

You see, Abel is the **first martyr**. He actually died for *his faith*. He was a man of faith—faith in Christ. He did what he was expected and told to do. He did it with a heart that flowed with the love of God. He was obviously a sinner too, which is why he presented his offering. He came before God with a sacrifice to atone for his sin. This made Cain furious, even as such things cause the world to rage today. For in doing this, he discovered the only way to conquer sin.

Cain proves that sin cannot be mastered by simply trying to conquer sin. It can only be mastered in a sacrifice that appeases God. Curiously, it is not merely Abel's offering that is a sacrifice of blood in this story, it is **Abel himself**. "**His blood cries out from the ground.**" Hebrews says that Abel's blood was a "**sprinkled**" blood, in other words, a **sacrifice** (**Heb 12:24**). God may call none or all of us here today to offer ourselves as physical sacrifices as martyrs in the days ahead. We do not know. He does call us to offer our bodies as "**living sacrifices**" where ever we go (**Rom 12:1-2**). But even this is not enough.

For the story of Abel points beyond himself to the sacrifice of another. You see, Abel's sprinkled blood points us to the need for a human to offer himself as a sacrifice once-for-all to atone for sin, for neither an animal death nor our own death can atone for what we have done, and bring reconciliation between us and God. This is why Abel's greatest purpose is **to point your forward to Christ**. If you see yourself as Cain, then know that Abel also saw himself as Cain, but he looked to Christ. For it is Christ's blood that speaks a "better word than the blood of Abel" (**Heb 12:24**).

Cain and Abel were under a covenant of works and a covenant of promise, but Christ is the mediator of a new covenant. His sacrifice alone pleases the Father. His death alone propitiates the wrath of God. For he alone is both God and man, perfect man, very God of very God.

Hebrews concludes this by saying, "**See that you do not refuse him who is speaking. For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less will we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.**" So put your faith in Christ. Worship him in Spirit and Truth. Obey him. Do what he

requires in all things. Do so out of love and thankfulness. Do so in union with Jesus Christ.

And let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire ([Heb 12:28-29](#)).