

The War Between Two Seeds

Genesis 4

Introduction

I once heard a story that I would like to share with you and then I would like to follow it up with a question. A man is on death row for murder, the day of his execution has come, and you have been invited to spend 30 minutes with the man. You ask the man if he is guilty; his answer seems sincere and heartfelt: “It was years ago when I committed that crime, but it is true that I am guilty of murder.” He continues to explain how year after year he and his lawyers have tried to appeal his death sentence, but all his appeals have failed. Now his only hope is the small chance his lawyers may be able to get the court, or even the governor, to agree to a stay of execution.

Just before your 30 minutes are up the man learns that there will be no stay of execution and within the next hour, he will die by lethal injection. You decide to stay to see if by some chance a reprieve might be granted. The time of execution arrives, and the man is ushered to the room where he will be executed. He passes by as you watch, and through his loud sobs, you hear the man repeat, “I am so sorry, I am so sorry! I am so sorry!”

My question for you is this: Is the man sorry that he took the life of another human, or is he sorry that he will never be able to murder again?

The account of the first family provides valuable insight into what genuine love for God and true worship look like. Following their disobedience in the garden, God gave Adam and Eve a promise: a Descendant—a seed—who would come to defeat and destroy the deceiver who had led them astray. Their reaction to God’s promise in the midst of their failure becomes a powerful example of repentance and worship. To truly grasp what led Cain to kill his brother, we must first consider how Adam and Eve responded to God’s assurance and what it reveals about the heart of repentance and worship.

Before Adam and Eve’s sin, they were commanded to fill the earth with children and not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The two trees in the center of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Every day that Adam and his wife passed by those trees, they were given the option to choose life and blessing by eating from the tree of life, or to choose death and cursing by disobeying God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. As you know, they chose death and cursing.

After God found them, His promise of good news to the couple was that One would come through their decedents who would crush the serpent. Their response to their sin and God’s

promise is found in Genesis 3:20 - 4:1, and it was beautiful! Adam named his wife “Eve” which means “mother of all the living.” God’s response after Adam named his wife was to cover them with animal skins, which means that God shed the blood of an animal to cover their shame. God then sent them out of the Garden which was the consequence of their sin and the new reality of the curse they would now live under. Then, even after they were no longer permitted to live in the garden, Adam and Eve responded in faith to the promise of God by finally choosing to have children with the birth of Cain and then Abel; when she gave birth to Cain, Eve said, **“I have obtained a male child with the help of the LORD.”**

The expectation Adam and Eve had for their son Cain was one of hope, filled with dreams that they also shared for Abel. When it came to the worship of Yahweh, Cain brought a portion from his labors from the ground while Abel brought **“the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions”** in worship to the Lord. What this tells us is that Adam and Eve shared the stories of their God with their two sons; they also instructed them in the way they were to worship God out of thanksgiving and reverence that all that they had was from the Lord. Both Adam and Eve understood that the Deliverer promised to them would either be one of their sons or one who would come by way of the sons of their children.

Although Cain and Abel grew up in the same household, raised by the same parents, and taught the same values, their lives and choices could not have been more different. Cain chose to work the soil as a farmer, while Abel became a shepherd, tending flocks (4:2). There was nothing wrong with Cain’s occupation, nor was his offering itself unacceptable. The real issue lay in the condition of Cain’s heart—spiritually, his attitude and motivation before God was deeply flawed.

Worship is More than What You Do

The offering that Cain and Abel brought to the LORD was their way of thanking God; it was their way of worshiping Him for all the good that He brought into their lives through their respective occupations. Cain was a farmer, so he brought the produce of His work to God not because God needed it, but as a way of worshiping Him. Abel was a shepherd, so he brought a portion of his labor before the LORD as an offering. In verse three we are told that Cain brought his offering, **“In the course of time..”** which is probably a reference to the end of the agricultural season. So, this was not the first time Cain or Abel worshiped God through their respective offerings.

Abel’s offering was that of the **“firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions.”** The reason for the detail here is that Abel’s offering was thought out, carefully prepared, and the best of what he had to offer God, while Cain’s offering was not. The point is that Cain came to God on his own terms, while Abel came to God on God’s terms. Cain’s offering was motivated out of obligation and duty, while Abel’s was motivated by reverence and love. We know Abel’s offering was motivated by his love and reverence of God for two reasons: First, according to verse 5, **“...but for Cain and his offering He had no regard. So Cain was very angry and his face was gloomy.”** The second reason is found in Hebrews 11:4, **“By faith Abel offered to God a better sacrifice than Cain, through which he was attested to be righteous, God testifying about his gifts, and through faith, though he is dead, he still speaks.”**

What I find amazing about this story is that God did not ridicule Cain for his half-hearted worship, but instead instructed him as to how his offering could be accepted just like his brother's was: **"If you do well, will your face not be cheerful? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must master it"** (v. 7).

Worship is a Matter of the Heart

Abel worshiped God as one who understood who he himself was in light of who God is (Abel was poor in spirit), he understood that his only righteousness was to be found in God (he mourned over his sins), and his offering came out of a spirit of humility before God (Abel was meek). For Abel, worship was not a duty, but a delight.

Cain's response to God's favor for Abel over himself reveals everything we need to know about the man. He first responded in anger (Cain believed what he had was enough), Cain did not listen to God (he did not see his sin for what it was), he was jealous of his brother's relationship with God (Cain's pride was wounded). Instead of repenting, Cain chose to murder his brother instead!

Cain had the opportunity to respond to God's displeasure with genuine repentance and humility, seeking forgiveness. Rather than mastering his sin, Cain allowed it to dominate him, channeling his rage into a tragic act: **"Cain talked to his brother Abel; and it happened that when they were in the field Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him"** (v. 8). The beast that God warned Cain about was not sitting at the door of his heart, it was lurking within his heart!

Faced with a choice between life and death, Cain chose death by taking his brother's life. The profound tragedy of Cain's actions lies in his motivation—he killed Abel not only out of anger, but because Abel's devotion reminded him of the holiness of God. While Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in their desire to be like God, Cain murdered out of spite, resenting his brother's sincere worship of God.

After Cain murdered his brother, God did not wait for Cain to confess; rather, He confronted Cain directly, asking, **"Where is Abel your brother?"** Cain's reply, **"I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"** (v. 9), which reveals not just his guilt, but also his attempt to deceive God. Cain committed not only the act of murder but compounded his sin by lying to God. Despite having witnessed his parents' experience—knowing that nothing can be hidden from God—Cain's response illustrates the irrationality of sin. He wrongly assumed his actions could be concealed from God and tried to cover them up with dishonesty. Where Adam shifted blame for his own wrongdoing, Cain chose to respond with outright deceit.

Cain's calloused answer to God regarding his brother is deafening. Yet the LORD approached Cain anyway: **"What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground. And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 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"** (vv.

10-12). What Cain failed to consider was that although dirt covered the corpse of his murdered brother, the blood of Abel screamed for justice, and that is what God gave Cain.

As is often the case with sin, Cain's actions had lasting consequences on his relationships. Once able to nurture life from the soil, Cain now found the earth to be hostile toward him. Overwhelmed by the severity of his punishment, Cain lamented, **"My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you have driven me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me may kill me"** (vv. 13-14).

What amazes me most about this story is that, even after Cain murdered his brother and responded to God with callousness and deceit, God still heard Cain's desperate plea for mercy. Instead of abandoning him, God responded with unexpected grace: **"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. Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden"** (vv. 15-16).

Ever since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, humanity's condition has not improved but has only deteriorated. The serpent tricked Adam and Eve into thinking they could be like God, but Cain escalated the rebellion by taking a life—something only God has the authority over—when he murdered his brother. Just a few generations later, human wickedness intensified. By the time we come to Genesis 6, we see that the sin of Adam and Eve had infected every generation, spreading like a disease until Scripture declares, **"The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"** (Gen. 6:5).

Application

I can hardly fathom the grief and devastation Adam and Eve felt upon discovering that their firstborn son had taken the life of his brother Abel. With Cain under judgment and Abel gone, Adam and Eve were left childless, and the promise God made to them in the Garden must have seemed shattered and out of reach.

Although Adam and Eve's sin resulted in a curse, they ultimately experienced redemption, forgiveness, and the hope of salvation. In contrast, Cain was condemned to wander the earth under a curse, and his life was irrevocably changed. From Cain's story, much like Adam and Eve's, we discover that sin always comes at a high price—it never fulfills its promises, it destroys peace, brings shame, and robs the sinner of true joy.

When darkness seemed to overwhelm and hope appeared lost under the weight of the curse, Adam and Eve conceived again and bore a third son and gave him the name "Seth" which means "appointed." This time, Eve's words reflected a shift in perspective: rather than saying she had a child with the help of the Lord, she instead said: **"God has appointed me another child in place of Abel, because Cain killed him"** (v. 25). With Seth's birth, Scripture notes that people

began to “**call upon the name of the LORD**” (v. 26). As S.A. Sacks observed, “Hope rises like a phoenix from the ashes of shattered dreams.” From the brokenness of the first family, God brought forth hope once more—specifically, through Seth and the enduring promise of a Deliverer.

The slaughter of Abel as an innocent representation of the God he served was a foreshadowing of the One who would come through the bloodline of Abel’s younger brother, Seth. Listen to Hebrews 12:24, “**...and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.**” Abel’s shed blood screams for vengeance, while the innocent shed blood of Jesus screams forgiveness and complete atonement. Abel’s blood screams: Judgment! Jesus’ blood screams: Salvation! When Abel’s blood was shed, it stained the ground, because of Jesus’ blood being shed, our sin can be washed away so that we can be made righteous.

When it comes to sin and temptation, the Bible says: “**But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it has run its course, brings forth death**” (Jas. 1:14-15). How does one master sin? The story of Cain provides us with three principles that will help us fight against our own sin in a way that Cain failed to do:

- **Recognize** that victory over sin begins in your mind. The battle against sin is first fought—and won—within your mind. Fill your thoughts with God’s Word to build a strong line of defense (2 Cor. 10:4-6).
- **Remember**, you are never trapped by your sin where there is no escape from it; God always provides a way out. Just as He offered Cain an escape, God offers you one too—don’t cling to the temptation by lingering before it. (1 Cor. 10:13).
- **Run** to Jesus, your Deliverer. When temptation strikes, turn immediately to Jesus. Fill your mind with His words, seek His redemption instead of dwelling in the shame of your failure (Heb. 12:1-2)
- **Rely** on the Holy Spirit’s strength—not your own—to overcome sin. Because Jesus defeated sin and death, you can experience genuine freedom. He has given you the Holy Spirit to equip and empower you to live a victorious life in Him (Eph. 6:10-11).

Before you this day are two trees. One is a tree that provides life, and it is the Cross of Christ. The other tree is one of death and cursing; it is the tree Cain chose. People who see you may not know what is going on in your heart and mind, but God sees it all! My appeal to you is to choose life by running to Jesus.