

Genesis 4:1-16

Sermon Focused Bible Study

In Genesis 4 we learn about two of the sons of the first family: Cain and Abel. Cain has a job like his father's, he takes care of the land. (2:15; 3:17-19) Abel was a shepherd. In this opening scene both brothers are bringing their sacrifices to the altar of God. Let's take a look at how the story unfolds:

In Genesis 4:3-5 we read: *4:3 At the designated time Cain brought some of the fruit of the ground for an offering to the Lord. 4:4 But Abel brought some of the firstborn of his flock—even the fattest of them. And the Lord was pleased with Abel and his offering, 4:5 but with Cain and his offering he was not pleased. So Cain became very angry, and his expression was downcast.*"

In Verses 3-5 we see that Cain was very angry that God was not pleased with his offering. *Can you tell from the text why God would not be pleased with the offering of Cain?*

Let's dig deeper to see if we can understand without a direct reference: *What are two reactions you can have to hearing that God is not pleased with you?*

Which of the two is prideful and which is humble? Which respects God and which accuses him?

Jealousy can often erupt in the face of our failure and the success of others. *Have you ever found yourself angry that God has blessed another while you have suffered?*

Proverbs 18:12 says, "*Before destruction the heart of a person is proud, but humility comes before honor.*" Harper's Dictionary calls humility, "a socially acknowledged claim to neutrality in the

competition of life.” A synonym for humility is meekness. Meekness is defined as **enduring injury** with patience and without resentment. With this definition it is easy to see that humility, or meekness is the foundation of all righteousness, but that pride is the foundation of all sin. *How does this help inform our understanding of God’s reaction to Cain’s sacrifice?*

Ecclesiastes 8:12 gives us an accurate view of our sinful failure, which can help us not to react the way Cain did when his sacrifice was rejected by God: *“Even though a sinner might commit a hundred crimes and still live a long time, yet I know that it will go well with God-fearing people—for they stand in fear before him.”*

What does this verse tell us about our failure and God’s love for sinners?

Genesis 4:6-7: *Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why is your expression downcast? 4:7 Is it not true that if you do what is right, you will be fine? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at the door. It desires to dominate you, but you must subdue it.”*

In this ‘paraenesis,’ an ancient form of exhortation designed to draw one’s audience to belief and denial,¹ *what lesson is God revealing to Cain?*

James 1:14–17 offers us one of the most insightful verses in scripture about temptation: *“But each one is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires. Then when desire conceives, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is full grown, it gives birth to death. Do not be led astray, my dear brothers and sisters. 17All generous giving*

¹ Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, vol. 36, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997), 77–78.

and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or the slightest hint of change.”

What do we see here is the source of our temptation?

How does this reinforce what God said to Cain in Genesis 4:7?

How does verse 17 inform our ideas about the imperfect gift of temptation?

God's gifts are good because they never promote evil desires in our hearts, rather the evil in our hearts is what drags us into sin.

Romans 8:6-8 confirms the true source of our sin: *“For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”*

This takes us back to Cain's response to God. He was hostile because his mind was set on the flesh. Therefore, he could not please God. We can see his hostility because of his anger and the murder of his brother. In 4:7 God is giving Cain the choice to master his sin or to be mastered by it. If Cain had only dealt with his initial sin rightly, he may have mastered it and not lost control, but as we see in the text he did not, and sin took control of him.

Genesis 4:8-10: *“Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let's go out to the field.” While they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” And he replied, “I don't know! Am I my brother's guardian?” But the Lord said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground!” (Genesis 4:8-10)*

From reading this passage, would you say that Cain's attack on his brother was pre-meditated?

We can see from this passage that the virus of sin the parents ingested into their lives was passed on to their children. *Does the question from God remind you of another question that He asked in a previous chapter? (see Genesis 3:9)*

How is Cain's response to God similar and/or different from his father's response in 3:12?

Why do you think Cain asks the rhetorical question: "Am I my brother's guardian?"

The second question God asks, "*What have you done?*" is similar to what He asked Eve in 3:13. He then says that the voice of Abel is crying out. *Where is it crying out from?*

What do we see happening to the ground in Genesis 3:17?

Numbers 35:33 adds this condition to the ground: *"You must not **pollute the land** where you live, **for blood defiles the land**, and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed there, except by the blood of the person who shed it." (Numbers 35:33, NET)*

How does this passage foreshadow the coming Christ?

In Genesis 4:11–16 we see Cain's punishment: *"So now, you are banished from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you try to cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its best for you. You will be a homeless wanderer on the earth." Then Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is too great to endure! Look! You are driving me off the land today, and I must hide from your presence. I will be a homeless wanderer on the earth;*

whoever finds me will kill me.” But the Lord said to him, “All right then, if anyone kills Cain, Cain will be avenged seven times as much.” Then the Lord put a special mark on Cain so that no one who found him would strike him down. So, Cain went out from the presence of the Lord and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden.”

Why do you think that Cain says his punishment is too great to endure?

Cain is punished in two horrific ways. He is cut off from community and removed from the presence of the Lord.

Leviticus 18:29 shows this same kind of excommunication: *“For if anyone does any of these abominations, the persons who do them will be cut off from the midst of their people.”*

Community is important to the people of God, and corporate responsibility has always been a part of faith. We are meant to bear one another’s burdens, to care for one another and to love one another. Community responsibility would have been an essential part of life for early man just as it is a part of the body of the church. When Cain forfeits this obligation to his family, he loses the protection of his family and fears for his life. We don’t know why God protects him and doesn’t kill him. Maybe it was to leave him as a sign to others not to murder, but we just don’t know.

Covenant law said that personal revenge was forbidden, so God would not have allowed anyone to kill Cain. Punishment is God’s job. See Leviticus 19:18: *“You must not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the children of your people, but you must love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.”*

But the worst of all was to be sent off from the presence of the Lord. Hell is described as a place void of the presence of God, so in this sense Cain was being sent to a living hell.

Do you yearn for the presence of God? In His presence there is 'absolute joy,' 'sheer delight,' (Psalm 16:11), 'rest' (Exodus 33:14), 'refreshing' (Acts 3:20), blessing (Matthew 5:8), protection (Hebrews 13:5), deliverance (Psalm 25:5), mercy and grace (Hebrews 4:16). If you feel that you are far from the presence of God or just want more of Him pray this prayer from His Holy Word:

O God, you are my God! I long for you! My soul thirsts for you, my flesh yearns for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water." (Psalm 63:1) Your presence is all I need. I have made You my shelter (Psalm 73:28) Without faith I cannot please You, for the one who approaches You must believe that You exist and that You reward those who seek You. (Hebrews 11:6) I know that when I call out to You and come to You in prayer, You will hear my prayers. When I seek You in prayer and worship, I will find You available to me. If I seek You with all my heart and soul, You will make Yourself available to me. (Jeremiah 29:12-14)