

Genesis 4

In this chapter, we have the origin of worship and the first murder. In fact, the chapter begins with worship (4:3) and murder (4:8) and ends with murder (4:24) and worship (4:26). Genesis 3 denoted the impact sin has on man's relationship with God. Here, sin impacts man's relationship with man. Following that action, man's descendants start diverging, between Cain's family and Seth's family. The end of the chapter begins genealogies which continue through chapter 5 when Cain and Seth's families will converge again in chapter 6 before the flood.

TRANSLATION - 4:1-2:

1 Now Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and she said, "I have acquired a man with [the help of] Jehovah." **2** She [conceived] again to bear her son, Abel. Now Abel was a shepherd of a flock while Cain was a servant of land.

WORDS:

"Knew" (vs 1) has been seen before in Genesis; here it suggests intimate knowledge, that is, the sexual relationship. The name "Cain" is a play on the verb "I acquired." "Acquired" (85x) is the typical word for purchasing. Why Eve would refer to her baby Cain at this point as a "man" is unknown (vs 1). "Abel" is related to the Hebrew word translated "vanity" throughout Ecclesiastes (cf. 1:2) but we find it baseless to suggest Abel's name is related to his short life span. When Eve named him, she had no idea his life would be short. It is common for commentaries to try to tie a person's name to events in their life but that's to assume the name came *after* the event. Some names *do* anticipate their future (cf. Matt. 1:21), but in those cases it is God who names the person, not a human acting alone. Otherwise, the implication is that the author made up a name to fit the event, a position we cannot accept as it implies the name, if not the event, is fictional.

GRAMMAR:

"Conceived" again (vs 2) is a *hiphil*. "With" (Gen. 21:20; 26:3, 24; 28:15; 31:3; 39:2; 49:25) is understood here to mean "with the help of."

COMMENTS:

This will be the last time Eve is mentioned in the OT, only twice by name in the NT: 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13. This is also the first time a person has identified God as "Jehovah." The other occasions were by Moses, the author. There is no indication that Adam and Eve had intimate relations while still in the garden. Cain was their first born. Eve conceived a second time, showing that Cain and Abel were not twins as some think. The phrase translated "with [the help of] Jehovah" is an unusual expression in Hebrew but Eve indicates Jehovah God helped her have a son. She names Cain based off the verb "to acquire." She does not indicate why she named Abel as she did. The last sentence in verse 2 jumps forward many years, to an adult Abel, a shepherd, and an adult Cain, a farmer. There is no reason to believe that God appreciates one occupation over the other.

APPLICATION:

Later Hebrew writers - As we have indicated, "Abel" is related to the word "vanity" or "breath" or "emptiness." David writes that all men's lives are a "breath" (*habel*, Psa. 144:4). Job echoes those sentiments (7:16).

TRANSLATION - 4:3-7:

3 It happened after a period of time that Cain brought from the fruit of the land an offering to Jehovah. **4** But Abel brought also himself from the firstborn of his flock and of its fat and Jehovah respected Abel and his offering. **5** But to Cain and to his offering He did not look

and Cain was extremely angry and his face fell. **6** So Jehovah said to Cain, “Why are you angry and why is your face fallen? **7** If you do good, will you not [have] acceptance and if you do not do good, at the door sin is crouching and its desire is toward you and you, yourself, should rule it.”

WORDS:

“Offering” (211x) refers to any type of offering, gift, or present, whether plant or animal. “Firstborn” (120x) will become God’s designation for His people, Israel (Exo. 4:22). The verb “respected” (cf. Exo. 5:9; Psa 119:117) means to look on favorably or be concerned about. “Angry” is used 93 times in the OT. The verb to “sin” is used 240 times; its basic definition is to “miss the mark.” For the literal conception of the idea, see Judges 20:16. Here, the noun (298x) is mentioned for the first time. There are at least ten different Hebrew words used as synonyms for sin, illustrating the spiritual focus of the Bible. “Crouching” (30x) pictures sin as an animal, ready to pounce on Cain.

GRAMMAR:

“A period of time” translates a phrase that suggests an indefinite period of time. Clearly, we do not know how long it was before worship was offered to God nor how old Cain and Abel were. “Brought” (vs 3) is *hiphil*. “Doing good” is *hiphil*.

COMMENTS:

Some amount of time has elapsed since verse 2. We do not know what has transpired since Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden but their sons have now come to offer something, in worship, to Jehovah God. “Offerings” could refer to plants as well as animals (cf. 1 Sam. 2:17, 29). How did they know they should offer? How did they know what to offer? How did they know when to offer? How did they know God would be pleased with what they offered? The account was not written to give us a theology of worship but it does give us a picture of the first act of worship. From our perspective, we know that God communicates His will to man so man can walk by faith (cf. 2 Cor. 5:7). We presume that God told Cain and Abel the specifics relative to worship; if not to them, then to Adam before them. This act of worship is not connected to sin nor its atonement. It probably is simply an act of thanksgiving.

It is likely that God showed His respect for Abel’s offering by sending fire directly from heaven to consume it (cf. Lev. 9:24; Judges 6:21; 1 Kings 18:38). Why did God accept Abel’s offering but reject Cain’s? Various suggestions have been given:

1. God prefers shepherds over gardeners (but, see 2:15).
2. God prefers animal sacrifices, that is, blood sacrifices.
3. God prefers, at least through Genesis, the younger son over the older son.
4. Abel’s attitude in the offering was appropriate, while Cain’s was not.
5. Abel offered the best of what he had (Lev. 1:3; 22:20-22; 2 Sam. 24:24).

We have no reason to believe #1 is an option. While it is true that blood sacrifices will be a part of the Mosaic law, God also commanded grain and cereal offerings so #2 is not an option. At this point in man’s history, #3 is not an option either. There is no indication here or elsewhere that God wanted Abel over Cain to carry on the Messianic promise. We are left with options #4 and #5, and probably both. There does seem to be an emphasis on Abel offering the best he had, the fattest that he had. Offering God our best always shows a high level of trust in God, that He will replace what we offer or at least see to our needs (cf. Eph. 3:20). Of course, we also know that Abel offered by faith (Heb. 11:4) and faith comes only from hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17).

It is sad to see that the first act of murder grew out of the first recorded act of worship. Cain was extremely angry with God’s choice and his demeanor grew sad, depressed, despondent. Just as He did with Adam and Eve, God appears on the scene and asks Cain a

question designed to encourage Cain to do some self-examination. First, God informs Cain that if he changes his behavior and “does good” (a verb based on the adjective “good”), he will also be accepted. However, if he does not do good, bad consequences will result. Sin, personified, crouches at the door, the door of his heart and mind, ready to pounce. As always, God acknowledges the free will Cain has. Cain has the ability, and the responsibility, to master the sinful feelings and thoughts he has. The words “desire” and “rule” are both repeated from God’s punishment of Eve from 3:16. Observe how frequently “brother” is used in verses 8-11 (6x), illustrating the heinousness of the crime. Will Cain make the right choice?

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Clearly God gives Cain the opportunity, under God’s gentle correction, to humble his heart, repent, and change the direction of his thoughts and therefore, his behavior. The point to make here is that Cain was always in control of himself and could have stopped himself from further sin.

Moses’ contemporaries - Israel will be required to offer the best they had, their first fruits and the best, or first, of their animals (Deut. 26:1-11; Lev. 22:20-22), including their firstborn (Exo. 13:2, 12-15). God will identify Israel as His “firstborn” in Exodus 4:22. “Fat” was considered the best part of the sacrifice and it belonged to Jehovah (Lev. 3:16; Deut. 32:38).

Later Hebrew writers - David acknowledges that he must offer to God something that is valuable, not the scraps (2 Sam. 24:24). The prophets will also challenge Israel to give to God what is best (Mal. 1:6-14). The sage will also warn that our hearts can make worship void (Prov. 21:27).

NT writers - It is a fact of spiritual life that man cannot walk by faith (2 Cor. 5:7) unless he hears a word from God (Rom. 10:17). So we know that God communicated to Cain and Abel the parameters for their worship and Abel worshiped within those parameters while Cain did not (Heb. 11:4). James pictures sin as growing from desires into disobedience, a growth we see reflected in Cain’s heart and behavior (1:13-15).

TRANSLATION - 4:8-15:

8 Then Cain spoke to Abel his brother and it happened when they were in the field that Cain arose against Abel his brother and he killed him. **9** Then Jehovah said to Cain, “Where [is] your brother?” And he said, “I did not know [that] the protector of my brother I myself [was].” **10** So He said, “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying to me from the land. **11** So now I curse you from the land which opened its mouth to take your brother’s blood from your hand. **12** When you will serve the land, it will not increase to give her strength to you. Moving and wandering you will be in the earth.” **13** So Cain said to Jehovah, “Great [is] my punishment to bear. **14** Behold, you have expelled me today from all the face of the land and from your face I will be hidden and I will be a mover and a wanderer in the earth and it will happen [that] all finding me will kill me.” **15** So Jehovah said to him, “Therefore, all [wanting to] kill Cain sevenfold he will be avenged.” So Jehovah placed on Cain a sign, not to strike him all [who] are finding him.

WORDS:

“Killed” (167x) is not distinguished from “murder” based on the Hebrew word. Whether taking another’s life is morally justified or not depends on the *motivation*, not the Hebrew word. “Killed” is used five times in this text (4:8, 14, 15, 23, 25). “Protector” (vs 9) is a participle with the definite article, using the same word from 2:15 and 3:24. Cain uses the pronoun in verse 9 for emphasis: “I am not my brother’s protector!” “Blood” (361x) will be a key term in biblical theology since sin will require the shedding of blood (cf. Lev. 17:11; Heb. 9:22). The word is largely used in one of two contexts: the shedding of innocent blood in violence or the offering of blood in atonement.

“Moving” and “wandering” (vs 12) are participles, with “wandering” being a cognate word with the land of “Nod.” They may also be understood as yet another hendiadys, two words conveying one idea: “a wandering fugitive.” “Punishment” (vs 13) can also be translated as “sin” (one of the ten synonyms for “sin”), the penalty and its origin being closely associated. The context here requires “punishment.” As a synonym for sin, it carries the idea of something that is crooked or perverse. “Driven” (vs 14) is the same word used of expelling Adam and Eve in 3:24. “Avenged” (35x) refers to taking vengeance. “Sign” (79x) means “mark, or pledge.” There is no way to know what type of sign this was; it was evident to others around so they would know not to kill Cain.

GRAMMAR:

“Increase” (vs 12) is *hiphil*. “Mover” and “wanderer” are both participles. “Expel” is *piel*. “I will be hidden” is *niphal*. “Killing” (vs 15) is a participle. “To strike” (vs 15) is a *hiphil* infinitive.

COMMENTS:

It is ironic, and yet the result of disobedience, that Adam and Eve ate of the fruit. They believed they could avoid God’s punishment of death but their firstborn subsequently murders their second born. Just as God had asked Adam and Eve what they had done, here, God graciously allows Cain to confess his sin. Instead, Cain radically denies knowing what God is talking about, just as Peter did with Jesus (Matt. 26:69-75). In fact, there is no verb in the last sentence and the pronoun is thrown to the end, suggesting a blunt refusal to accept responsibility for his brother’s absence.

Abel’s blood (vs 10) is plural, suggesting either his life itself, or multiple wounds inflicted by Cain. God had not personally cursed Adam (3:17) or Eve but here, Cain is cursed. Consider how the land swallowed up Korah (Num. 16:30, 32) and how it “vomited” out the Canaanites (Lev. 18:28). Cain’s personal responsibility is highlighted in the verse. God curses Cain personally and he identifies Abel as Cain’s brother and that it was Cain’s hand which killed Abel.

God is going to aggravate Cain’s farming (vs 12), a sin related to the offering Cain ostensibly gave to God. Cain will also be a nomad and a wanderer. Cain responds, not with remorse, but with complaint, that his punishment is greater than he can bear. Cain seems to be complaining that his punishment is worse than his parents, that he is being driven further than they were. He is expelled from the land, as well as, from the face (presence) of God.

He also feared that relatives would take vengeance on him. Who are these whom Cain fears? With long life spans (Adam will live to be 930 years old [5:5], Cain’s brother, Seth, to 912 years [5:8]), there will be many occasions where a relative can take vengeance on Cain. With the patriarchs living for centuries, it is entirely possible that Cain could have been old by modern standards before any of this took place and Adam and Eve could have had many children and grandchildren by now.

God’s grace is seen again in His response to Cain’s fear. God threatens to take vengeance on any who would try to kill Cain. Cain will leave God’s presence, His “face,” but not God’s protection. God will put a sign on Cain to warn that no one should take vengeance on Cain. Indeed, Cain will go on to have a family and produce children who will create many aspects of human civilization. God’s mercy is expressed throughout the incident.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - God gives Cain another opportunity to repent but Cain refuses to admit any sin and refuses to admit any responsibility. Adam and Eve, at least, acknowledged their sin even if they tried to shift responsibility. Once Cain hears his punishment, he asks for mercy, which God graciously gives him.

Moses' contemporaries - Soon, by biblical chronology, the earth will fill with violence (Gen. 6:11-12) and wickedness (Gen. 18:20). In the Law, God will state that shed blood will pollute the land (Num. 35:33-34; Deut. 19:10-11), an argument for capital punishment following

the flood (Gen. 9:5) and today. Murder was forbidden under the law (Exo. 20:13; 21:12, 15). God required the Israelites to leave vengeance to Him (Deut. 32:35, 41).

Later Hebrew writers - God continued to care about the death of the innocent (1 Kings 21; Isa. 26:21; Psa. 37) but His people often resorted to murdering their fellow Israelites (Isa. 5:7). Blood crying out from the ground is a picture also used frequently by later writers (Job 16:18; Ezek 24:7-8). Ezekiel (9:4-6) pictures God's followers as having a sign or mark on them. It was a metaphor to denote God's knowledge of those who belong to Him.

NT writers - Jesus warns His contemporaries that His elect who cry to Him will be heard (Luke 18:7-8). Cain's behavior must be avoided (1 John 3:11-15; Jude 11). The martyred saints in Rev. 6:9-10 know that one day, God will take vengeance on their persecutors. In John's message to the Christians suffering under Roman persecution, the apostle will note that God's children are now "sealed" on their foreheads so that God recognizes those who are His (Rev. 7:3; 14:1; 22:4). Jesus identified Abel as the first to be killed for his faith (Matt. 23:35; Luke 11:50-51) and, according to Hebrews 12:24, Abel's blood continues to speak to man, albeit not as powerfully as the blood of God's Son. Finally, God still requires His children to leave vengeance in His hands (Rom. 12:19).

TRANSLATION - 4:16-24:

16 So Cain went up from the face of Jehovah and dwelt in the land of Nod, to the east of Eden. **17** Then Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch and it happened they built a city and called the name of the city like the name of his son, Enoch. **18** And there was born to Enoch Irad and Irad gave birth to Mehujael and Mehujael gave birth to Metushael and Metushael gave birth to Lamech. **19** And Lamech took for himself two wives; the name of one, Adah and the name of the second, Zillah. **20** Then Adah gave birth to Jubal; he was the father of those dwelling in tents and [who tend to] livestock. **21** And the name of his brother [was] Jubal; he was the father of all [who] play the lyre and the pipe. **22** Then Zillah herself gave birth to Tubal-Cain, [who] sharpened every plow of copper and iron and the sister of Tubal-Cain [was] Naamah. **23** And Lamech said to his wives

"Adah and Zillah, Listen to my voice,
Lamech's wives, give ear to my speech,
because a man I killed, for my wounds
and a child for my hurt.

24 If sevenfold Cain will be avenged,
then Lamech seventy-seven [fold].¹

WORDS:

"Livestock" would refer to all animals that are herded together; it is a different word than "flock" in 4:2. "City" (1,088x) can refer to any type of settled location whether large or small. "Jubal," in Hebrew, sounds like the word for a ram's horn (*yobel*) blown to mark the year of Jubilee and other religious occasions (Exo. 19:13; Lev. 25:9-10; Joshua 6:5). "Lyre" and "pipe" (vs 21) are two of the oldest instruments of music made by man. The lyre was a stringed instrument while the pipe was a wind instrument.

GRAMMAR:

"Building" is a participle. "Was born" (vs 18) is *niphal*. "Play" is a participle. "Sharpened" is a participle. "Listen" and "give ear" are imperatives, the latter a cognate word to the noun "ear." "Be avenged" (vs 24) is *pual*, the passive form of the *piel* verb.

¹ This text is the first example of Hebrew poetry, noticeable by its parallel ideas. That is why we have set it apart from the narrative.

ARCHEOLOGY:

Neither “Nod” nor “Enoch” are identifiable today. Since Moses identified Nod as east of Eden, it was a real place at one time. It is not simply a figurative reference to Cain wandering in what some scholars want to call the “Land of Wandering.”

COMMENTS:

If we do not see outright the forgiveness of God in allowing Cain to remain alive, we at least see His mercy in not giving Cain what he deserved (death). In the last two chapters, man has been moving further and further “east,” away from the personal presence of God which Adam and Eve had enjoyed in the garden. Cain knew his wife, to use “know” in the same sense of sexual relationships as in 4:1. In humanity’s infancy, God allowed (it was necessary) interfamily marriage. Abraham married his half-sister (20:12). Cain’s family built a city and named it after their son, Enoch. Some see this as Cain defying God’s requirement that Cain be a nomad, but verse 12 could simply be a prediction, rather than punishment, of Cain leaving his parents.

Verse 18 gives a few generations from Cain, which could be extending human history hundreds of years beyond the events of 4:1-16. Again, we hesitate to make any significance from the names of Lamech’s wives, Adah and Zillah, as many commentators have done. Adah’s son, Jabal (vs 20), will be the ancestor of those who dwell in tents and who keep livestock. “Father” is used here metaphorically, as it is sometimes used. His brother, Jubal, was the “father” of musicians, the two oldest instruments being listed. Zillah also gave birth to two, a boy and a girl. The boy was the “father” of metalworking. What is often translated “bronze” is actually copper, which would later be mixed with tin to form bronze. The second child, a girl, was Naamah.

Verses 23-24 are identified as poetry. We see the descent of man further and further into sin as Lamech claims that he killed a man for striking him and a young man (child?) for striking him. Whether he did or did not (it is poetry), Lamech is claiming vengeance, far greater vengeance even than God does, for himself, another step away from God’s plan for man.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Whether Lamech was actually injured or he is just bragging, he has taken the promised vengeance by God into his own hands. Mankind is on a downward spiral from Cain’s act of mindless vengeance to Lamech’s promised act of intense vengeance. This spiral will culminate in the destruction of the world in the days of Noah.

Moses’ contemporaries - Sibling marriage will be forbidden under the Law (Lev. 18:9-18). In the Law, God will require Israelites to make the punishment fit the crime (Exo. 21:23-25), which Lamech is refusing to do.

NT writers - Jesus requires His disciples to forgive one another “up to seventy times seven” (Matt. 18:22). The tree of life from the garden of Eden will be enjoyed again, in the city identified as heaven in Revelation 22.

TRANSLATION - 4:25-26:

25 Then Adam knew again his wife and she bore a son and she called his name Seth because, “God has given me another seed after Abel because Cain killed him.” **26** And for Seth even to him was born a son and he called his name Enosh, then he began to call on the name of Jehovah.

GRAMMAR:

“Began” is a *hophal*.

COMMENTS:

For the third time in the text, to “know” is used for the sexual relationship. The third son, like the first, has a name associated with an action related to God. Seth’s lineage continues as

he also has a son, Enosh. The name “Enosh” can also be used for man (42x, compared with *adam*, 554x), in which case, it denotes man’s frailty and weakness. At this point, mankind calls on the name of Jehovah God, an indication of concerted worship practices and trust in Jehovah God. We see, then, man still practicing only monotheism and God is known as Jehovah.

WORDS:

We have already pointed out that “seed” (229x) is a key term in Genesis, as well as, throughout the OT. This “seed” is anticipating the fulfillment of the promise God made to Satan in Gen. 3:15. The seed will come through the line of Abraham, to grow to include his whole family, the nation of Israel, and then shrink once again into the faithful remnant, and then finally into the boy born to Mary (see Galatians 4:4).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - There is a sharp contrast between the descendants of Cain and those of Seth. If Cain’s lineage began various aspects of human culture, Seth’s lineage turns back to dependence on Jehovah God. We live in a physical world (illustrated by Cain’s descendants) governed by spiritual realities (illustrated by Seth’s descendants).

Moses’ contemporaries - “Call on the name of the Lord” means, generally worship, but could specifically suggest prayer (Gen. 12:8; 13:4; 21:33; 26:25). It might even be understood more broadly as a realization that man needs to walk by faith in God as a lifestyle, not just acts of worship like prayer.

Later Hebrew writers - The Israelites will eventually trace their lineage through Seth (1 Chron. 1:1).

NT writers - Jesus’ line, the “seed,” does go through Enosh and Seth, back to Adam, the son of God (Luke 3:38). The expression “those who call on the name of the Lord” will come to denote Christians (cf. 1 Cor. 1:2).