

# Cain and Abel

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And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I've gotten a man from the LORD. And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought up the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. And the LORD said unto Cain, why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? And if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him. And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him. And the Lord said unto Cain, where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? And he said, What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground. And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; when thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, the punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou has driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, that everyone that findeth me shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the East of Eden (Genesis 4:1-16).

## Introduction

In Genesis chapter 4, the inspired narrator turns his attention from the origin of sin in humanity to its lasting effect on mankind. The focus of chapter 3 was to note how the first man (the federal head of mankind) fell and brought guilt, moral depravity, and spiritual and physical death to the human race. In chapter 4 we see the consequences of the fall on the first social institution—the family. The purpose of the narrator is not to write a history of man as a modern historian would record events; but, to write the history of redemption. Starting from the fall of Adam and the promise of a Redeemer (made ironically to the devil in the first couple's presence), Moses goes on to set forth the crucial elements of human history that result in the godly line and the victory of Jesus Christ, as well as the wicked line that opposes God's rule. Regarding this rich portion of God's word, there are a number of introductory matters that merit our attention.

First, the story of Cain and Abel follows the story of the fall chronologically, structurally and logically. After the creation account and sin of Adam, we are shown how the curse of sin

affects daily life. Man's rejection of God's command and his fall leads to enmity, not simply between man and God but also between man and man. Eve's lack of faith in Jehovah's law-word led her to rebel against his instructions. Similarly, Cain's lack of faith in God's instructions regarding the acceptable means of approaching him in worship leads not only to rebellion in the form of human autonomy in worship; but also, the persecution and murder of the godly seed. "The godless quest to be liberated from the authority of the highest Lawgiver leads to horrible licentiousness, also in the area of mutual human relationships."<sup>1</sup> The wickedness of fallen humanity is readily observed in comparing unfallen Eve's sin to that of fallen Cain. Eve had to be persuaded to sin by the subtle deception of Satan. Cain simply followed the inclination of his fallen nature. After Cain became angry and God kindly appealed to him to do the right thing and avoid falling into an even greater sin, Cain stubbornly disregarded this appeal and deliberately sinned against this direct revelation of God. Moreover, when God pronounced judgment on Adam and Eve, they listened to their sentence with silent resignation. Cain bitterly protested against God that his judgment was unjust and far too harsh. The history immediately after the fall reveals that mankind is totally depraved; that sin is firmly entrenched in the human family and that man's history will be one of conflict and bloodshed.<sup>2</sup>

The pattern of this story is similar to the fall narrative with a number of closely parallel scenes. "The central scene in each case is a terse description of the sin (3:6-8//4:8) which contrasts strikingly with the long dialogues before and afterwards. The following scene in each case where God investigates and condemns the sin is remarkably similar: cf. 'Where is Abel your brother?//Where are you?' 4:9; 3:9; 'What have you done?' 4:10; 3:13; 'You are cursed from the land' cf. 'You are more cursed than all domesticated animals; the land is cursed because of you' 4:11; 3:14, 17.... Both stories conclude with the transgressors leaving the presence of God and going to live East of Eden (4:16; cf. 3:24)."<sup>3</sup>

Second, contrary to modernists, skeptics and neo-evangelicals, Genesis 4 is intended as a literal historical message, not myth, legend or a story made up or redacted by priests at a later date. Jesus accepted the story at face value and named Abel as the first persecuted and murdered saint (cf. Mt. 23:35; Lk. 11: 50-51). The author of Hebrews refers to Abel's blood sacrifice as a great act of faith (Heb. 11:4). John mentions Cain as a supreme example of wickedness and hatred contrary to love (1 Jn. 3:11-12). Jude speaks of wicked men, who reject authority as people who have followed "in the way of Cain" (v. 11). The assumption throughout the whole Bible is that all Scripture is breathed out by God or inspired (2 Timothy 3:16) and thus is infallible and totally reliable. Those who reject the testimony of Christ and the apostles on this matter are followers of Cain, not the Redeemer.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Ch. Aalders, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 1:116.

<sup>2</sup> Derek Kidner writes, "Sin is shown with its own growth-cycle as in James 1:15, and in 7b it is personified in almost Pauline fashion (cf. Rom. 7:8ff.). Many details emphasize the depth of Cain's crime, and therefore of the Fall: the context is worship, the victim a brother; and while Eve had been talked into her sin, Cain will not have even God talk him out of it; nor will he confess to it, nor yet accept his punishment" (*Genesis* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967], 74).

<sup>3</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 99.

Third, this narrative is rich in doctrine and covers a number of important topics. It shows the antithesis between the godly believing line and the wicked unbelieving line. This is a major theme of the Bible, for the true church is persecuted throughout history. Behind this antithesis are two completely different plans for dominion. In God's plan we have election, faith, the line that will lead to Christ's victory, as well as those who are obedient, who are part of visible church. The devil's plan is founded upon human autonomy, situation ethics, rebellion against God, faith in mankind and salvation through self-effort. Thus, this scene sets the pattern for the Old Testament's history of redemption. In addition, it reveals the true approach to God versus the false humanistic approach. Abel, the author of Hebrews says (11:4), had true faith and thus approached Jehovah *through a blood sacrifice*, which symbolized the sacrificial death of Christ. Cain offered the fruit of the ground or the work of his own hands. Thus, in the very beginning of redemptive history, the two antithetical views of salvation are set before us: salvation through faith in Christ or salvation through works. It also teaches about true and false worship, in that their faith was exhibited in an act of worship. Abel had faith in God's prior revelation and thus offered a burnt offering. He had an understanding of *sola Scriptura* or the principle that we are not to add to or detract from what God has commanded. Cain followed that satanic philosophy that we can be a law unto ourselves. He offered the fruit of the ground because he thought it was a good idea. He is the first innovator in worship in history. Fourth, the chiasmic structure between the clauses is deliberate and once again as part of beautiful Hebrew storytelling: Cain – Abel (1-2a); Abel – Cain (2b); Cain – Abel (3-4).

### The Narrator's Introduction to the Story

Verses 1 and 2 set the scene for the drama that follows, tie the story to the preceding narrative and constitute the opening of the genealogy of Adam: "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, 'I have acquired a man from the Lord.' Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground."

The expression "Adam knew Eve his wife" is a common Semitic way to say that Adam had sexual relations with his wife. Although the Hebrew term, "know" (*yāda*), is a broad term similar to our English word, in this context it is a euphemism for sexual intercourse. One could paraphrase it, "Adam was intimate with Eve his wife." The phrase "with Eve his wife" emphasizes that their sexual relationship was lawful and blessed. Interestingly, although the word "know" is used in Scripture of illicit relationships (e.g., homosexual relations, Gen. 19:5, and incest, Gen. 38:26), usually different terms such as "go into" (Gen. 16:2, 4, 38) or "lie with" (39:7) are preferred. These expressions focus on the fact that, in illicit relationships built on lust, there is not a true reciprocal intimacy. The word "know," when used of lawful marital intimacy, implies a deeper and more intimate relationship than a mere physical interaction. Consequently, the NIV phrase "lay with" is a poor translation.

The point of saying that Adam knew his wife Eve is to tell of the conception and birth of Cain, presumably Adam and Eve's firstborn son. The name Cain (*qayin*) has an uncertain etymology. It is likely that Cain (*qayin*) is based on a popular or poetic etymology due to its similarity in sound to the verb "acquire" (*qana*) used by Eve. Some scholars believe it is connected to the Aramaic word *qenāya*, or *qenāa* and the Arabic word *qaynum*, meaning "[metal]smith" or "worker in metal." Cain's direct descendent, Tubal-cain, is described as the father of metallurgy (cf. Genesis 4:22). Due to the context, the name is likely connected to Eve's acquiring a man from God.

After the birth of her son Eve joyfully exclaims, "I've acquired a man from the LORD" (v. 1b). Eve acknowledges that children are God's gifts. She took comfort in the fact that Jehovah had enabled her to bear a son. The dominion mandate will be fulfilled. "Though Eve bore him with the sorrows that were the consequences of sin, yet she did not lose the sense of the mercy in her pains. Comforts, though alloyed, are more than we deserve; and therefore our complaints must not drown our thanksgivings."<sup>4</sup> Given the promise of the coming Redeemer through her seed and the fact that this was Eve's firstborn son, it could very well be that Eve regarded Cain as the heir to the promise. As Leupold observes,

The experience of birth with its travail having been successfully terminated, she ascribes what she acquired to Jehovah's help. In this phrase lie both thankfulness and praise: thankfulness at deliverance from pain and danger, praise that Jehovah is manifesting his grace and faithfulness in giving a son. So the use of the name "Yahweh" should be observed. Apparently, then, since the name stresses His gracious faithfulness, Eve praises God that He who promised victory to the seed of the woman actually lets "seed of the woman" be born. Nothing indicates whether Eve did or did not anticipate that this very seed, Cain, should personally crush the serpent's head. But, in any case, she had a token of Yahweh's fidelity.<sup>5</sup>

Eve's words of praise and thanksgiving indicate that although she had been deceived by Satan and sinned against God; she had realized her great error; she repented and placed her faith in God's word of promise. With this thought in mind, her words of joy could be viewed as a confession of her faith.

Due to the Hebrew text, which is liable to different translations, there is another interpretation of this verse that is possible. The Hebrew year could be translated, "I have gained a man—the LORD." (This translation was preferred in the ancient church and the Middle Ages.) According to this translation, Eve viewed Cain as the promised One to come, the God-man. The problem with this view is that it reads the much later developed theology of the coming Messiah back into Eve's thinking. While Genesis 3:15 is clearly a prophecy about Jesus Christ who is the son of God—the second person of the Trinity—the passage itself gives no hint that the "seed of the woman" was to be divine. That the Messiah was to be fully man and fully God was revealed at a much later time in redemptive history. Although we do not prefer this translation or

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<sup>4</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (McLean, VA: McDonald, n.d.), 1:36.

<sup>5</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1942), 189-190.

interpretation, we do believe that, in some sense, Eve saw the birth of Cain as leading to the fulfillment of the maternal promise. Tragically, Cain failed miserably to live up to Eve's hopes.

In verse 2 we read about Abel, Cain's brother. "Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (v. 2). Because no reference is made to Adam having sexual relations in the case of Abel, a number of scholars believe that Cain and Abel were twins. This view is unlikely given the fact that: (1) Scripture in other places, takes note of the birth of twins (Gen. 25:23-24). (2) given the context and brevity of the account, the omission of such a reference to the conception of Abel is not significant. It could be expected. (3) The twins argument is based on silence and thus, although interesting, cannot be proved. That Cain and Abel were brothers is enough information for the point of the story.

The word Abel means "vanity," "breath," or "futility" in Hebrew. It may be that his name was in a sense prophetic and alluded to the tragic fact that his life would be cut short before he could get married and raise a family. His name calls to mind Psalm 144:4, "man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow." Some believe that the name is not prophetic but rather reflects Eve's disillusionment with life after the fall. Life in the fallen world was marred by sin and seemed rather empty and futile compared with life in paradise. Since the name meaning "vanity" or "breath" seems somewhat depressing, some think the name comes from the Sumerian *ibil[a]* or the Akkadian *ab* (plural) meaning "son."

In 2b the different occupations of the two brothers are noted to help explain the first scene of the story which regards their offerings. Abel was a keeper of sheep (the Hebrew word is used of small livestock: both sheep and goats), while Cain tilled the ground. Some scholars have argued that there was a rivalry here between two different ways of living: pastoral and agricultural. Such a view is read into the story and one must not see conflict unless one can find it in the text. In fact, it is likely that both learned their occupations from Adam their father. The population of the earth consisted of the family of Adam and Eve at this time and the division of labor among the sons makes sense and reveals no disharmony. The farmer and shepherd could trade with each other to provide each family's needs. The tiller of the ground could provide grain and vegetables while the shepherd could provide milk, yogurt, cheese, and perhaps leather. Together the two sons could make a well-rounded diet. (Whether they ate meat at this time seems doubtful based on the permission given to Noah in 9:3.) It is noteworthy that the sons of the first parents are observed in callings that required diligent labor. Adam worked and cared for the garden in paradise and his firstborn son was a gardener. In naming the animals, Adam learned the nature of various species and likely taught his second son about goats and sheep. The biblical account reveals the first family as intelligent and immediately involved in dominion work necessary for civilization. The evolutionist presupposes that our ancestors were primitive hunter-gatherers who lived in a state of poverty due to stupidity. The Bible presents man as immediately engaged in developed, settled labors. The Scriptures give us the true picture, while the evolutionist bases his theories on looking at wicked, degenerate, savage cultures (e.g., the nomadic hunter-gatherers in Africa).

## Scene One: The Two Offerings

The first scene opens with the first two brothers in history at worship: “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the LORD. Abel also brought the firstborn of the flock and of their fat” (v. 3-4a). There are a number of significant things about this scene. First, note that a specific time of worship is mentioned. The phrase “in the process of time” (v. 3a) in Hebrew is literally “after the end of days.” The expression is vague and has been interpreted in two different ways. One view is that this signifies the end of the week or the Sabbath day. We know from other portions of Scripture that the Sabbath day (the seventh day during the Old Covenant era and the first day [the resurrection day] in the New Covenant) is the weekly appointed time of rest and worship. Another view is that an indefinite period of days is used because this was a special time of worship at the close of their agricultural year. In favor of this view are the following observations: (1) If the Sabbath day was in view, why not be more specific? (2) The fact that Abel brings the firstlings of his livestock (i.e. the firstborn animals) and Cain brings some of his produce probably indicates that this was a time of special thanksgiving at the end of the agricultural season. While the latter interpretation makes more sense, one could assume based on the analogy of Scripture that this occurred on the Sabbath after the harvest. The point of this story is not to prove that there is a special appointed time for public worship; nevertheless, given the doctrine of *sola Scriptura*, one can assume that both brothers were following some form of direct revelation regarding the time. It is obviously not a coincidence that they are making their first offerings at the same time of year.

Second, it is also noteworthy that they brought the offerings to the Lord at a particular place. Cain brought produce and Abel brought “the firstlings of his flock and the fat thereof.” Abel brought a burnt offering which suggests an altar upon which the innocent victim would be slain or its blood poured out and the fatty portions burnt. While it is not the purpose of this story to focus our attention on the precise place of sacrifice, it nevertheless does imply a special place where sacrifices were offered unto the Lord. That God’s special presence was to be found at this place of worship is suggested by the language of verse 16 at the end of this narrative, “and Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.” Although we are not told where the sacrificial area was, the last verse of chapter 3 would likely be viewed by the Jews who first read this narrative as implying that God’s special presence was to be found at the gate or entrance on the eastern border of the Garden of Eden: “So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (3:24).

The cherubim were mighty angels described in a number of ways in Scripture (some have two wings [1 Kgs. 6:24], others four [Ezek. 1:6, 11]). What is significant is that they are specifically presented in Scripture as those angels who attend the special presence of God. Jehovah is characterized as the One “who is enthroned (Heb., “sits”) on the cherubim” (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 2 Kgs. 19:15; 1 Chron. 13:6; Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Isa. 37:16). God is repeatedly

represented as dwelling above the cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89). The Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle and Temple all were decorated with cherubim to indicate God's special presence at the place of worship.

These cherubim were "stationed" or literally in Hebrew "caused to camp," at the east gate or entrance to Eden. Note that the garden of Eden had only one entrance on the east which is the same as the Tabernacle/Temple complex, entered by a gate on the eastern side. The cultic overtones of the cherubim, their being "caused to camp," and the location of the gate on the east side of the garden are unmistakable. It seems that while man was barred from Paradise and the tree of life, Jehovah instituted animal sacrifices in order to maintain a relationship with Adam and Eve. They could not enter the garden, but they could approach God near the gate of the garden through the shed blood of clean animals. The last verse of chapter 3 contains a number of powerful symbols that, interpreted in light of later Sanctuary/Temple design teach us that the garden of Eden was a kind of archetypal sanctuary where God was uniquely present in all his blessedness and life-giving power. Because of the fall, Adam and Eve were forced to leave the garden. But now God (in His love, grace and mercy) came out of the garden to meet with the fallen couple near the gate to fellowship with them through the Mediator symbolized in the bloody death of a clean animal. Although the first sin was wicked and was a complete disaster for our first parents, God reached out to them with His saving grace. All this reminds us that, while we can never do anything to achieve heaven or enter paradise, Jesus came down out of heaven to save and rescue us from our own sin, wickedness and stupidity. Christ suffered for us outside the gate so that the veil of the holy of holies could be torn wide open, that we could have eternal life and access to God.

Third, the two brothers offered two very different offerings. Abel offered the firstlings (*bekōrot*) of his flock and the fatty portions that cover the animal's innards. This sounds like a typical Old Testament burnt offering. "These fatty portions were forbidden for human consumption, perhaps because the fat, like the blood, belonged to God (see Ex. 29:13; Lev. 3:3-5, 9-11, 14-16; 4:8-10, 26, 31; 7:23-25; 1 Sam. 2:15-16; Ezek. 44:7, 15, both of which connect 'fat' and 'blood').... Such fat was burned on the altar, and the smoke resulting from this incineration was a pleasing aroma to God (Gen. 8:21; Ex. 29:18; Lev. 1:9; etc.)."<sup>6</sup> Not only do we find Abel offering a burnt sacrifice, which is found in the law of Moses, but also the firstborn which the law says belongs to God (Ex. 22:30, "Likewise you shall do with your [firstborn] oxen and sheep [offer it to God]. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day [i.e. the day symbolizing a new beginning or the resurrection of Christ] you shall give it to Me"). "The very positive connotations of 'firstlings' and 'fat' and the Old Testament support the view...that Abel offered the pick of his flock to the LORD."<sup>7</sup> He offered a clean, perfect specimen without spot or blemish.

The question that arises regarding this offering is *how* did Abel know what offering was pleasing to God? How did he know to offer a clean animal, the firstborn of the flock and a burnt

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<sup>6</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 223.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 103.

offering, all of which are explicitly commanded thousands of years later in the law of Moses? There are really only two alternatives before us. One view is that Abel came up with this idea on his own and God liked his sacrifice because he offered the best and was sincere in heart.<sup>8</sup> The other view, which according to the analogy of Scripture is the only biblical alternative, is that Abel was acting on some prior direct revelation that was not enscriptured; that came either to him or more likely to his parents—Adam and Eve. This revelation probably occurred when Jehovah killed animals to make covers for Adam and his wife (cf. Genesis 3:21). As Matthew Henry eloquently states,

These coats of skin had a significancy. The beasts whose skins they were must be slain, slain before their eyes, to show *them* what death is, and (as it is Eccl. iii.18) that they may see that they themselves were beasts, mortal and dying. It is supposed that they were slain, not for food, but for sacrifice, to typify the great sacrifice, which, in the latter end of the world, should be offered once for all. Thus the first thing that died was a sacrifice, or Christ in a figure, who is therefore said to be the *Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*. These sacrifices were divided between God and man, in token of reconciliation: the flesh was offered to God, a whole burnt offering; the skins were given to man for clothing, signifying that, Jesus Christ having offered himself to God a sacrifice of the sweet-smelling savour, we are to clothe ourselves with his righteousness as with a garment, that the shame of our nakedness may not appear.<sup>9</sup>

This interpretation is proved by the following considerations: (1) The author of Hebrews under divine inspiration says, “by faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain” (11:4). Throughout Hebrews 11 (and indeed throughout the whole Bible) true faith is spoken of as a belief in God’s word that results in obedience to God’s revealed will. This point is rather obvious, in that our faith in God and Jesus Christ is *totally dependent* on what we learn about Jehovah in Scripture. Faith in the Redeemer is a faith in Jesus *as He is revealed to us in the Bible*. If one seeks to divorce faith from God’s word, then faith becomes either faith in faith itself (as if we were saved *because* of faith and not *through* faith which lays hold of Christ [i.e. faith as an instrument, not faith as a *meritorious cause* or *foundation* of redemption]) or merely an irrational or arbitrary leap in the dark. That is, its connection to the truth is severed.

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<sup>8</sup> There are a number of speculative and erroneous views as to why Abel’s sacrifice was accepted while Cain’s offering was not: “(1) what grows spontaneously is a more appropriate sacrifice than what has to be cultivated (Josephus); (2) Cain’s fruit was not ‘first fruit,’ and thus it was inferior to Abel’s ‘firstlings’ of his flock (Ibn Ezra, Philo); (3) God does not approve of farming (Cain) because it keeps a man rooted to one spot, whereas shepherds (Abel) are peripatetic and come in contact with the world (Gunkel); (4) Cain was “niggardly” (see Victor P. Hamilton, 224); (5) God liked Abel’s sacrifice because its soothing aroma smelled much better than grain offering (Saul Levin); (6) The fault of Cain is some indiscernible (i.e. to us) heart attitude that displeased God (Hamilton); or similarly Cain’s motive was bad while Abel’s was good (Dillman, Driver, Konig); Many evangelicals seek the answer in the sincerity or insincerity of the two offerers; (7) “God’s motives are inscrutable: his preference for Abel’s sacrifice reflects the mystery of divine election (von Rad, Golka, and apparently Westerman)” (see Gordon J. Wenham, 104); (8) In line with number 2 most commentators seek the answer in the *quality of the gifts*. None of these views are biblical, for they all neglect the analogy of Scripture. Hebrews 11:4 makes it clear that the issue was faith and faith presupposes submission to a prior revelation.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:34.

Therefore, when the author of Hebrews speaks of Abel's offering of a sacrifice by faith, it can only mean that Abel trusted in God's revelation and understood that Jehovah could only be approached in worship through the sacrificial offering of a clean animal. Abel did well to present the blood of the firstborn lamb (or goat), not as in itself the ground of acceptance with Jehovah, but as a type of the perfect, once-for-all sacrifice which his bloody offering symbolized. He approached God in worship by faith, recognizing his own fallen state, guilt and inability to do anything in and of himself to make him worthy to come into God's presence. By slaying the lamb, pouring out its blood, carving up the dead animal and burning it on the altar, he by faith accepted the death of the sinless Mediator to come. From Abel to the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary, the blood of bulls, goats and lambs represented the expiation of sin and reconciliation (symbolically and typically) achieved by the future Savior before the people. The faithful understood that they were not redeemed by the ritual, but rather by what the bloody rite pointed to—the atoning death of Christ. Therefore, to reject the blood offering (and its spiritual and typical meaning) as Cain did, was an act of apostasy, unbelief and rebellion.

Abel's trust in God's word as the basis of acceptance is supported by the analogy of Scripture. Paul says that "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). That is, our behavior must be founded upon the Word so we know that it is right. If we are not sure if an act or practice is ethical or authorized by God's word, then we are not allowed to guess, make it up as we go along, or innovate. To do so, Paul says, is sinful. This teaching rules out the idea that Abel decided to offer a lamb because he was a shepherd and thought it would be a good idea. The apostle says in the same epistle, "Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). God preached the gospel to Adam and Eve. Matthew Henry writes, "We have reason to think that there was a divine appointment given to Adam, as a token of God's favor to him and his thoughts of love towards him and his, notwithstanding their apostasy. God would thus try Adam's faith in the promise and his obedience to the remedial law; he would thus settle correspondence again between heaven and earth and give *shadows of good things to come*. Observe here, 1. That the religious worship of God is no novel invention, but an ancient institution. It is that which was from the beginning (1 John i.1); it is the good old way, Jer. vi.16."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 1:37. This interpretation is accepted by all the great Reformed commentators. Calvin writes, "Moreover, it will be here proper to recall to memory what we have before said, that the first men, though they had been deprived of the sacrament of divine love, when they were prohibited from the tree of life, had yet only been so deprived of it, that a hope of salvation was still left of them, of which they had the signs in sacrifices. For we must remember, that *the custom of sacrificing was not rashly devised by them, but was divinely delivered to them*. For since the Apostle refers the dignity of Abel's accepted sacrifice to *faith*, it follows first, *that he had not offered it without the command of God*, (Heb. xi. 4.)" (*Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980], 1:192-193, emphasis added). John Gill says, "...*The Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offering*; as being what he had designed and appointed to be used for sacrifice in future time, and as being a suitable type and emblem of the Messiah, and his sacrifice; and especially as being offered up by faith, in a view to the sacrifice of Christ, which is of a sweet-smelling savor to God, and by which sin only is atoned and satisfied for, see Heb. xi.4. God looked at his sacrifice with a smiling countenance, took, and expressed delight, well-pleas'dness, and satisfaction in it" (*An Exposition of the Old Testament* [London: Matthews & Leigh, 1810], 1:33). John Brown concurs, "Though we have no particular account of the institution of sacrifice, the theory of its originating in express divine appointment is the only tenable one. The idea of expressing religious feelings, or of expiating sin, by shedding the blood of animals,

If God preached the gospel to Adam and Eve and taught them the proper, true or biblical mode of worship and approach to Himself, then why does Genesis 4 not discuss Adam's offering but the offerings of his first two sons: Cain and Abel? The answer to this question is simple. God wanted to set before our eyes a *sharp contrast* between that which is true and false. We see a true and false understanding of redemption; and a true and false understanding of worship; a true and false piety; and a true and false faith or profession. (Moreover, we see that from the very beginning of redemptive history God's sovereignty in salvation is manifested according to the principle—"Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated" [Rom. 9:11-13; cf. Mal. 1:2-3]. Cain, Adam and Eve's firstborn son, who followed in his father's calling as a tiller of the soil [cf. Gen. 3:23], was reprobate).

(2) The interpretation that Abel based his offering on prayer and divine revelation is the only view that harmonizes with the rest of Scripture's teaching on worship. The Bible says that, when it comes to ethics, doctrine and worship, we are not to add to or take away from what God has spoken (Deut. 4:2; 12:32; Ex. 20:4-5; Lev. 10:1-2; Josh. 23:6; Jdg. 17:6; 21:25; 1 Sam. 13:8-13; 2 Sam. 6:3-4, 6-7; 1 Chron. 15:13-15; 1 Kgs. 12:28-33; Prov. 4:27; Jer. 7:31; 19:5; Mt. 15:1-9; 28:20; Mk. 7:5-13; Jn. 4:19-20; Col. 2:16-23; Rev. 21:18-19). The idea that Abel came up with his own method of approaching God in worship and that God honored it because he was sincere or had faith in his own clever mode of worship is clearly contrary to Scripture and incompatible with *sola Scriptura* and biblical Christianity. If we adopt such an interpretation, we must abandon the Protestant Reformation, true liberty of conscience, and, in principle, adopt a Roman Catholic concept of doctrine, practice and worship that flows from two sources: the word of God and human tradition.

## Cain's Offering

Cain, unlike his brother, decided to offer unto God some agricultural products. "Fruits of the field" such as barley or wheat would be the natural offering of an agriculturalist if men were permitted to decide for themselves what to offer to God. Many modern commentators see nothing wrong with the offering itself because the law of Moses specifies grain or cereal offerings. The grain offering is described after the burnt offering (cf. Lev. 1) in Leviticus 2. It

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could never have entered into the mind of man. We read that God clothed our first parents with the skin of animals, and by far the most probable account of this matter is, that these were the skins of animals which He had commanded them to offer in sacrifice. We have already seen, in our illustrations of the ninth chapter, ver. 16, that all divine covenants, all merciful arrangements in reference to fallen man, have been ratified by sacrifice. The declaration of mercy contained in the first promise seems to have been accompanied with the institution of expiatory sacrifice. And expiatory sacrifice, when offered from a faith in the divine revelation in reference to it, was acceptable to God, both as the appointed expression of conscious guilt and ill desert, and of the hope of mercy, and as an act of obedience to the divine will. It would appear that this revelation was not believed by Cain, that he did not see and feel the need for expiatory sacrifice, and that his religion consisted merely in an acknowledgment of the Deity as the author of the benefits which he enjoyed. Abel, on the other hand, did believe the revelation. He readily acknowledges himself a sinner, and expresses his penitence and his hope of forgiveness in the way of God's appointment. Believing what God has said, he did what God had enjoined" (*Hebrews* [Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1963 [1862], 493-494).

consisted of choice flour (Lev. 2:1-3) or choice grain (Lev. 2:14-16) to which olive oil and frankincense would be added. A portion would be burned on the altar—"an offering made by fire, a sweet aroma to the LORD" (Lev. 2:9). The cereal offering was only to be offered after the burnt offering. Unlike the burnt offering, which involved the shedding of blood of a spotless, clean animal, which was expiatory, the cereal offering was merely a gift by the worshiper to Jehovah. "God having granted forgiveness of sins through the burnt offering, the worshiper responded by giving to God some of the produce of his hands in the cereal offering. It was an act of dedication and consecration to God as Savior and covenant King."<sup>11</sup> It was not simply an act of thankfulness but also expressed a willingness to dedicate every aspect of life to God. It is regarded as symbolizing devotion to Jehovah or sanctification. The grain offering was always presented after some animal sacrifice to show the connection between vicarious sacrifice and sanctification; or pardon of sin and personal devotion to the Lord. The moment that we are saved by Jesus Christ, all that we possess must be used to serve him; all of our actions must be directed to obedience to him. In offering up some agricultural produce in an act of thanksgiving, the worshiper acknowledged that God had given him salvation and the great blessings that flow from that salvation.

All of this raises a question. Is it possible that God had revealed to Adam and Eve not only the need of a blood sacrifice but also the grain offering? It is possible. But, unlike the burnt offering which is found throughout Genesis before the giving of the law (e.g., see Gen. 8:20; 22:2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 13; 38:24), there is no mention of any grain offerings. Nevertheless, even if a grain offering had been commanded, Cain's offering would have been sinful for a number of reasons.

(1) The text indicates that Cain the older brother brought his offering *first*. If God instituted cereal offering right after the fall like animal sacrifices, then one could assume that God would have explained its meaning like the meaning of blood sacrifice was explained. (For Adam and his family to have faith in the sacrificial death of a substitute, they had to have some understanding as to what it represented. Otherwise, it would have been an empty ritual. Likewise, if a grain offering was revealed, its purpose, meaning or symbolism would have been explained as well.) If the cereal offering then was instituted, Cain should have understood that cereal offerings are only acceptable and properly offered if founded upon a slain lamb. That is why the grain offering *always* followed the burnt offering. Consequently, Cain did not follow the due order and his offering was hateful to God. It was an act of rebellion.

(2) By making his offering of grain to Jehovah *before* the burnt offering, Cain was presenting himself and his possessions before God as if he were acceptable without a blood sacrifice. He was acting as though he was not a fallen, polluted, guilty sinner and could approach God through the labor of his own hands. He approached Jehovah through works instead of through Christ. "He sought to be accepted by his *holiness*, and so overthrew *salvation by Christ*. Acts of charity, substituted for Christ's work, as a means of pacifying the conscience, make up precisely this sin of Cain. Nor are they any less mistaken who think, by self-denial, and by doing

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<sup>11</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 71.

good to others in their life and conduct, to obtain favor, and be accepted with God.”<sup>12</sup> We see that the old error of the Pharisees and Roman Catholics of placing personal obedience, sanctification, law-keeping or acts of piety before justification is the oldest heresy regarding salvation in history. Whether one believes that Cain made up his own offering, or chose to reject God’s instructions because he did not see any need for blood atonement, because he was self-righteous, his sin is essentially the same. He rejected the word of the Lord and did what was right in his own eyes because he did not have faith in the blood sacrifice as a symbol of Christ. He trusted in himself instead of God. He was self-righteous, self-sufficient, and arrogant; and, therefore, he acted autonomously in both salvation and worship. In the very first narrative after the fall, we see that the twin pillars of true religion—biblical worship and the doctrine of salvation—are the first doctrines cast aside by fallen man.

## The Lord’s Response

The two different offerings resulted in two very different responses from God: “And the LORD respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering” (vs. 4b-5). The expression “respected” in Hebrew means “paid attention to” or “recognized.” God had regard for, or approved of, Abel’s blood sacrifice, but did not accept Cain’s offering. The important question is: why was one accepted and the other not? Since we have already noted the many erroneous views regarding these verses and have discussed what was right and wrong regarding these offerings, we will summarize our findings. Abel’s offering was pleasing to God because: a) It conformed to God’s command or instructions regarding offerings. It was by divine appointment and was authorized by Jehovah. b) It was offered in faith toward what God had commanded and the reality behind the typology or symbolism that the offering represented. Abel approached God through the Mediator and thus his person was accepted as righteous on the basis of the sacrificial death of another (i.e. the Messiah to come).

Abel did virtually the exact opposite of Cain. Cain’s offering was rejected because: a) he did not believe in God’s revealed will; and b) he therefore either simply made up his own offering out of his mind or heart; or (if a grain offering had been appointed), he did not follow the due order (blood sacrifice or atonement first, followed by a grain offering).

The application from this verse is simple, yet critically important. As noted, it teaches two crucial things about biblical religion. First, that no one can come to the father except through Jesus Christ. Like Abel, we must acknowledge that we are guilty sinners and that the only way to have expiation of sin and reconciliation with God is to trust in the shed blood of the spotless Lamb. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Jn. 14:6). The lesson of Cain and Abel (which is taught throughout the whole Bible) is that the Redeemer and His sacrificial death on the cross is *not merely* one way to go to God in heaven but is *the only way to gain eternal life*. There is no other way at all. When Cain

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<sup>12</sup> Andrew Bonar, *Leviticus* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, [1846] 1966), 34.

offered the fruit of the ground instead of the appointed blood offering, he was rejecting the Christ to come and was placing his trust in his own works.

Second, this passage teaches that acceptable worship can only be based on God's infallible word. It must be grounded solely on faith and divine revelation and not human innovation. We find this principle succinctly stated in God's law: "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it" (Deut. 12:32). When it comes to doctrine, ethics and worship, we are to be governed solely by the word of God. Cain believed that if he was sincere and that what he made up in his own mind seemed pious and good, that God would accept it. But God emphatically rejects human autonomy in worship. Jehovah is infinitely holy and righteous. He can only be approached on His terms. He expects faith and obedience to His word. If one adds to His word by making up worship practices and content that cannot be proved from Scripture,<sup>13</sup> then by such actions he is essentially professing that the worship that God has instituted is somehow inadequate, defective, incomplete and can be

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<sup>13</sup> This proof can be attained by an explicit command of God (e.g., "Do this in remembrance of Me," Lk. 22:19); or by logical inference from Scripture (i.e., there may not be an explicit command but when several passages are compared they teach or infer a scriptural practice); or by biblical historical example (e.g., the change from the seventh day to the first day of the week for corporate public worship). "There is of course of careful distinction to be made between the Word of God and inferences drawn from the Word of God. We may challenge the validity of inferences drawn from Scripture and attempt to determine whether they are indeed scriptural, but we may never in the same way challenge the validity of the explicit statements of Scripture. The words and statements of Scripture are absolutely authoritative. Their authority is underived and indisputable. The authority of valid inferences from Scripture on the other hand, is derivative in nature, but one cannot argue that such inferences are therefore less authoritative than the express declarations of Scripture. They simply make explicit what is already expressed implicitly in Scripture" (Michael Bushell, *The Songs of Zion* [Pittsburgh, PA: Crown and Covenant, 1993 (1980)], 124). Some of the most important and foundational doctrines of Christianity are drawn from inferences of Scripture, such as the hypostatic union of the two natures in Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. That the use of "good and necessary consequences" or logical inference from Scripture to formulate doctrine is biblical can be seen in the following passages: Luke 20:37ff, Matt. 22:31ff, Mark 12:26, Matt. 19:4-6, 1 Cor. 11:8-10

An instance of historical example is Lord's day public worship. There is no explicit command or divine imperative changing public worship from the seventh day (Saturday) to the first day (Sunday) of the week, recorded in Scripture. Yet in the New Testament, the change from the seventh day to the first day is recorded as an accomplished fact (Ac. 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2, Rev. 1:10). Not every divine command or prophetic word has been inscripturated (i.e. included in the Bible). The universal practice of the apostolic church, such as Lord's day public worship, is binding because of the unique authority given to the apostles, i.e., direct revelation. When the apostles died, direct revelation ceased and the canon was closed; now our doctrine, worship, and all historical examples are limited to the Bible, the Word of God. Those who appeal to church traditions, invented after the closing of the canon, for authority in establishing worship ordinances are, in principle, no better than Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (1 Kgs. 12:26-33).

The scriptural law of worship is very simple: "The Holy Scripture prescribes the whole content of worship. By this is meant that all elements or parts of worship are prescribed by God Himself in His Word. This principle has universal reference to worship performed by men since the fall. In other words, it has equal application to the Old and the New Testaments. It is also universal in that it is regulative of all types of worship, whether public, family, or private" (William Young, "The Second Commandment" in Frank J. Smith and David C. Lachman, eds., *Worship in the Presence of God* [Greenville, SC: Greenville Seminary Press, 1992], 75).

improved upon and perfected by the autonomous ingenuity of fallen man's mind. Such behavior, although almost always couched in terms of sincerity and piety, is in principle a violation of the second commandment (which tells us that we must only worship the true God *in the true biblical manner*) and is exceptionally arrogant. It is what Paul calls "will-worship" (*ethelothreskeia*) (Col. 2:23, KJV). The apostle warns us that it is sinful for professing Christians to develop modes or forms or content of worship by the human will instead of simply accepting the means of worship established by God in His word.

While many conservative Protestants today recognize that Jesus Christ is *the only way* to receive forgiveness from sin, and imputed righteousness and the gift of eternal life, the lesson of biblical worship from our text is tragically largely lost. The approach to God in Christian worship is viewed as an area where human creativity, innovations and "exciting" inventions are a good thing that pleases God. The trend in evangelical and many Reformed churches for over a generation has been on "worship" that entertains and excites churchgoers: music soloists, rock bands, skits, pastor-comedians, videos, celebrity guest speakers, performance choirs and so on. In large evangelical churches, people even clap after a performance as though they were at a rock concert or a Broadway play.

Anyone who looks objectively at this kind of worship can only conclude that:

(1) Such worship is a product of American culture (e.g., Hollywood, Broadway, Las Vegas) and has nothing to do with the Bible. If God rejected Cain's offering because it was not commanded or authorized by divine revelation, then He certainly has no regard for these crass human inventions. Such worship is not only dishonorable and irreverent, but also is sinful and humanistic. As Girardeau remarks, "In this act the Majesty of the Most High is directly confronted. The worshiper presents himself face-to-face the infinite Sovereign of heaven and earth, and assumes to lay at his feet the sincerest homage of the heart. In the performance of such an act to violate divine appointments or transcend divine prescription, to affirm the reason of a sinful creature against the authority of God, is deliberately to flaunt an insult in his face, and to hurl an indignity against his throne."<sup>14</sup>

(2) Such worship is anthropocentric or man-centered and not God-centered. The purpose of worship is not to please our own fancies and attempt to stimulate our senses. It rather is to glorify God. How are we to glorify God in worship? The answer to this question cannot be answered by so-called Christian psychologists or sociologists, or even modern church growth experts. Only God speaking in the sacred Scripture can tell us what pleases Him.

(3) Such worship cannot be offered in faith, for biblical faith is always connected to divine revelation. As the reformer John Knox notes,

It is not enough that man invent ceremony, and then give it a signification, according to his pleasure.... But if that anything proceed from faith, it must have the word of God for the assurance; for ye are not ignorant, "That faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of

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<sup>14</sup> John L. Girardeau, *Instrumental Music in the Public Worship of the Church* (Havertown, PA: New Covenant Publication Society, 1983 [1888]), 22.

God.” Now, if ye will prove that your ceremonies proceed from faith, and do please God, ye must prove God in expressed words has commanded them: Or else shall ye never prove, that they proceed from faith, nor yet that they please God; but that they are sin, and do displease him, according to the words of the apostle, “Whatsoever is not of faith is sin.”<sup>15</sup>

(4) Such worship is a fountain of heresy, declension and apostasy. (It is for this reason that our text’s message is so important and relevant to today’s ecclesiastical situation.) This point is proved by noting *the long-term effects* of human innovations in worship. What happens to churches that, over time, allow men to invent new modes, forms, ordinances or content of Christian worship? First, the innovation becomes a loved and accepted aspect of public worship by the people even though it was never commanded. Therefore, it becomes a beloved church tradition which is then passed on to the next generation. The church becomes so accustomed to the new practice that anyone who questions the unauthorized practice or attempts to extirpate it is maligned and persecuted. Second, each generation clings to the old innovations and then adds a few more. Over time the elements of worship once delivered to the saints are more and more forgotten, lost and corrupted. Third, the corruptions finally become so severe and extensive that the commanded worship is almost completely lost. The accumulations of false worship practices eventually replace the biblical worship ordinances (e.g., humanly devised holy days such as Christmas and Easter have largely replaced the Christian Sabbath; uninspired human compositions whether hymns or modern charismatic pop songs have replaced the book of Psalms, God’s inspired hymnbook; pop psychology sermonettes and funny or touching stories have replaced solid exegetical-experiential expository preaching, etc.). So many generations have passed since biblical worship was practiced that churches are hardened in their rebellion against the word of God in this area. Fourth, churchmen in this scenario become so corrupted that they develop highly sophisticated arguments against biblical worship and thus help hold the people in darkness and rebellion. A study of church history reveals that the many arguments for non-authorized forms of worship arose *after* the corruptions were already accepted. (This is true for uninspired hymns, non-commanded “holy days,” the use of musical instruments in worship, and the widespread rejection or redefinition of the regulative principle of worship.) It is the pride of depraved human nature and a sinful desire to run with a multitude to do evil (Ex. 23:2) that underlies the many justifications of will-worship. Fifth, the rejection of *sola Scriptura* in worship and the accumulation of human traditions destroy the unity and peace of Zion. How can two walk together unless they agree (Amos 3:3)? As corrupt worship drives out true worship, corrupt communions drive out faithful ministers, elders and families. Worship that is founded upon human tradition is schismatic, for genuine Christian unity can only be founded upon the truth. Corruptions in doctrine and worship have splintered the visible church as men congregate around their separate man-made traditions instead of around the faith once delivered to the saints. The path to biblical ecumenicity is to abandon all human innovations in doctrine and worship and bow the knee to Christ speaking in the Scriptures. When modern Reformed denominations

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<sup>15</sup> William Croft Dickenson, ed., *John Knox’s History of the Reformation in Scotland* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), 1:87.

abandon *sola Scriptura* in worship and seek unity through the acceptance of pluralism in doctrine and worship, they deny the perspicuity of Scripture and reject the divine commandment to all believers to have the same mind, the mind of Christ (Rom. 15:6; 1 Cor. 1:10; 2:16; 2 Cor. 13:11; Phil. 1:27; 2:2, 5; 3:16; 4:2; 1 Pet. 3:8; 4:1).

## Cain's Reaction to God's Rejection

In 5b we read that Cain was extremely upset that God had no respect or regard for his offering of the fruit of the earth: "And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell." As to how Cain knew that God rejected his offering, the text is silent. In many instances in later history, Jehovah demonstrated His acceptance of an offering by fire coming down from heaven and consuming the sacrifice (e.g., see Lev. 9:24; Jdg. 6:21; 1 Kgs. 18:38; 1 Chron. 21:26; 2 Chron. 7:1). If this did not occur, God may have expressed His acceptance or rejection verbally. In any case, the Lord wanted to make sure that Cain understood that his offering was unacceptable. Divine criticism is an act of kindness. Cain was not an atheist; he was ready and willing to acknowledge the existence of God and offer Him worship. He, at this time, was part of the visible church. Jehovah, then, was willing to give Cain the truth about his corrupt worship for his own good. Jehovah is merciful and long-suffering and therefore He did not immediately write off or dismiss Cain; but, gave him an opportunity to repent and submit to the only acceptable means of approach—a blood sacrifice. God, being just, righteous, holy and true, had to honor the symbolism of the death of His Son, for "without [the] shedding of blood there is no remission" (Heb. 9:22).

The expression "very angry" indicates that Cain's response was intense. When someone is described as "very angry" in Scripture, it is often a prelude to violence and murder (cf. Gen. 34:7; 1 Sam. 18:8; Neh. 4:1; Num. 16:15; 2 Sam. 3:8). This anger was completely unjustified and wicked. Cain was very angry with God for rejecting his human ingenuity and self-perceived sincerity, as well as for refusing to honor the work of his own hands. His anger was probably intensified by the fact that God's rejection of his offering was public. Cain was angry because he was self-righteous and proud. His confidence was in his own achievement; and, thus, he was like the Pharisee who glorified himself and consequently was not justified before God. This anger reveals that he not only did not trust in God's word like his brother Abel, but was actually hostile toward the truth. If he were a true believer, he would not have been angry with God but with himself for his own lack of faith and obedience. If he had genuine faith, he would have expressed humility and deep concern that his worship was unacceptable and offensive. He would have asked God to help him get it right instead of being filled with rage. "Note, it is a certain sign of an unhumiliated heart to quarrel with those rebukes which we have, by our own sin, brought upon ourselves. *The foolishness of man perverteth his way*, and then, to make bad worse, his heart fretteth against of the Lord, Prov. xix.3."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:38.

We know from verse 8 that Cain was also angry with his brother Abel. Rejection and hatred of God and His word always leads to hatred toward the righteous. It appears that Cain had an unholy envy toward his brother because God accepted his sacrifice and showed love to Abel on account of the Christ to come. Although his brother had simply obeyed God and had not done anything wrong, Cain was indignant. It is the nature of faithless fallen men, who corrupt the true religion with salvation by law-keeping and autonomous worship, to hate those who profess the true Reformed religion and seek to damage or destroy them. The Pharisees walked in the way of Cain when they persecuted Christ and the apostles for walking in the truth. Their eye was evil and their hearts were full of envy and hatred because Christ was so beautiful, good and perfect—morally, doctrinally and essentially. For many generations after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, Roman Catholic authorities relentlessly persecuted Reformed believers because they hated justification by faith alone, *sola Scriptura* and biblical worship. By following in the footsteps of Cain, they became a synagogue of Satan. We should tremble when we see the declension in modern Reformed churches who have not only departed from biblical worship and who openly tolerate neo-Romanists in their midst (the Federal Vision apostates), but who also repeatedly exhibit displeasure and contempt toward those who advocate for a return to the old paths—the attainments of our covenanted reformation.

Cain's anger (Hebrew—*hāra ap*, literally “nose burns”) is followed by an outward display of contempt. Cain's “countenance fell” or literally “face fell.” This can be associated with depression or, as in this context, an indication of discontent and anger (cf. Jer. 3:12; Job 29:24).

## God Counsels Cain

In verse 6 God responds to Cain's anger and discontentment by asking two questions about Cain's response to the rejection of his offering; this is followed in verse 7 by a question designed to encourage Cain to repent and do the right thing, coupled with a dire warning of the consequences of continuing and disobedience and unjustified anger: “So the LORD said to Cain, ‘Why are you angry? And why is your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.’” When Jehovah ask someone a question, He obviously already knows the answer. The purpose of the first two questions is to get Cain to contemplate why his offering was unacceptable and see the irrationality of his anger. By carefully analyzing the reason for his severe anger (God cannot and will not accept autonomous worship and salvation by works), he may come to an understanding that the only one who should be angry with such an offering was Jehovah. God wants Cain to see that the proper response to what happened should be self-examination in light of divine revelation, godly sorrow for sin and a turning away from the unbiblical behavior to the lawful, sanctioned approach to God. This point is emphasized by the follow-up question: “If you do well will you not be accepted?” It is as though God was saying, “Cain, your offering was sinful and unacceptable. If you repent of this sin by admitting that what you did was wrong (i.e. not commanded, not authorized, or not by divine appointment) and

repent by replacing this ungodly humanistic approach to salvation and worship with the proper authorized sacrifice, you will be forgiven. The blood of the spotless Lamb will cover over or wash away your guilt and you will be fully accepted by Me.”

We see here Jehovah Himself telling Cain that the solution to his anger is faith in the Mediator and then corresponding obedience. The gospel of Jesus Christ is not something new or only for the New Covenant era. It was preached in typological form from the very beginning of human history after the fall. The lesson here for all of us is that no matter how wicked, sinful and foolish we have been, if we place all of our faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death and turn away from our past sinful lifestyle (which is a fruit of true faith), we will have peace and fellowship with the true and living God. Jehovah will fully accept us and even adopt us into His own spiritual family (Gal. 4:5; Rom. 8:15, 23); not on the basis of anything that we have done but solely on account of the merits of Jesus Christ.

God’s conditional promise of blessing is followed by a strong warning of the terrible consequences of continuing in sin or rejecting the path of faith and obedience: “And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (v. 7b). Jehovah is essentially saying, “Cain, if you do not repent of your wicked autonomous doctrine and practice and the sinful anger burning inside of you as a result of your unwillingness to accept My displeasure with your sin and My delight in Abel’s offering, then further more serious sin lies (Hebrew, “is crouching”) at the door of your heart like a vicious beast ready to strike and tear you asunder. Sin’s desire is to have dominion over you by leading you into more wicked behavior. Therefore, you must master it (by believing My word and repenting) before it gains mastery over you.” The sentence, “Its desire is for you, but you should rule over it,” is strikingly similar to God’s statement to Eve in Genesis 3:16: “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” As a result of the fall and the curse, wives will have a sinful tendency to want to control their husbands, but husbands will be masters over their wives.

One of the worst consequences of refusing to deal with sin and repenting is that sin leads to further sin and calamity. Jehovah is faithfully and carefully warning Cain to nip sin in the bud before it goes further and springs upon him and devours him. If Cain refused to believe in the appointed blood sacrifice, refused to worship God as commanded and refused to repent of his sinful unbiblical anger, he was setting himself up for a life completely dominated by wickedness. Unresolved sinful anger is especially dangerous in that it is a source of many serious sins: gossip, tale-bearing, lying, violence, retaliation and even murder. Consequently, Paul warned believers about it saying, “Be angry, and do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26-27). (In verse 7 sin is personalized as a great and dangerous enemy; as an aspect of the devil’s plan for a satanic dominion.) Cain had a choice to make: he could believe and obey God or he could continue to trust in his own wisdom and philosophy regarding salvation, ethics and worship. This is a decision that every human being must face. We must either place our trust in Jesus Christ and His finished work, then bow the knee to His law-word; or, walk the path of human autonomy, pride, self-reliance and wickedness.

It is telling that the text moves to the next scene without any indication that Cain even said a word. There is something ominous about Cain's silence. He is not reported to have thanked God for the warning; or to have contemplated his error; or even have one thought of repentance. Given the next verse, it seems he was dwelling on his resentment and hatred of his brother instead of focusing on God's excellent teaching. The heart of unregenerate man is incredibly stubborn and blind to the truth. Cain had the gospel presented to him by Jehovah Himself and yet refused to repent. In this we see an historical example of Paul's words: "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8).

## Hatred and Anger Fulfilled: Cain's Premeditated Murder of Abel

In verse 8 we see that the divine counsel and warning is emphatically rejected by Cain in favor of hatred, resentment and premeditated murder: "Now Cain talked with Abel his brother, and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (v. 8). In this scene Cain and Abel are the only participants. The severe wickedness of Cain's act is brought out in a number of ways.

First, the text strongly implies premeditation or careful planning to permanently remove his brother from the family's encampment outside the east gate of Eden. The verse begins, "Now Cain talked with Abel his brother," without telling us what Cain said to Abel. In Hebrew storytelling, the words of a conversation can be omitted when it is obvious what was said and the stark brevity accentuates the action. The context indicates that Cain invited Abel out in the field where they would be alone or safe from observation. Consequently, both the Greek Septuagint and Samaritan version, as well as the Latin translation, add, "Let us go out to the field." Cain did not heed Jehovah's teaching and his intense anger caused him to fantasize about retaliating against his brother. Instead of thinking biblically and rationally about recent events and obeying God by putting his anger, resentment and bitterness aside, Cain comes up with a plan to set a trap for his brother so that he can isolate him and beat him to death. This is a shocking illustration of James 1:15, "When desire [i.e. unlawful lust] has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown [i.e. matured, finished, come to a climax], brings forth death." By deceiving Abel, Cain moved him into a field outside of observation. He wanted no witnesses to his crime and Able to be far away from any help. Because he was unregenerate, Cain failed to consider the fact that Jehovah was watching and that God, who is infinitely holy and righteous, will judge sin.

This premeditation unto such a horrible act ought to stand out as a strong warning to all Christians of the great danger of not dealing with anger, envy, malice and hatred—biblically and immediately. There is no ethical or practical neutrality in the Bible when it comes to unlawful thinking and desiring. One is either actively applying biblical principles to unlawful thoughts and desires in order to subdue them, achieve victory over them and progress in Christian sanctification; or one is toying with unlawful lusts and thoughts. The one who nurtures sinful thoughts is moving in the opposite direction of godliness or Christ-likeness headlong into

greater, wickeder and more scandalous sins. Adultery with another man or woman always begins with illicit lusts in the heart. Theft always begins with covetousness toward someone else's money or property. Premeditated murder is always rooted in the hatred and malice of unlawful anger or envy. Our Lord implied that physical murder is an extension of heart-murder (Mt. 5:21-22). Cain thought that he did well to dwell on his anger; that he was justified in his hatred and consequently his hatred moved from his mind into action. "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1 Jn. 3:15). Overt acts begin with hidden thoughts; homicidal fantasies can move into homicidal actions.

Second, the verse emphasizes not just that he committed murder but that he killed his own brother: "his brother" is repeated twice. As the firstborn son, Cain should have done everything he could to protect, help and nurture his younger brother. Instead, he beat him to death and spilled his blood on the ground. This was not only a great sin against Abel but also his own parents who would have been caused incredible pain and grief due to this crime. In addition, Cain did not kill a wicked, reprobate, criminal person but a God-fearing, righteous brother—a person who loved and served God. Abel had never done anything to Cain or anyone else that deserved blows or death. Cain's actions were all built on lies and unjust conclusions. Cain had a god-complex and thus sought to play God with his own brother's life. Moreover, in striking out against his righteous brother, there was a sense in which he was striking out at God Himself, for God accepted Abel and loved him on account of Christ. Cain's exceptional wickedness and hypocrisy is noted by John who says, "And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 Jn. 3:12b).

The Bible is very clear in its teaching that wicked men who reject the truth hate righteous men who believe the truth. Abortionists, atheists, communists, homosexuals, Muslims, Jews, and so on hate real Christians and would persecute them out of existence if they could. We must always remember that a genuine follower of Christ is a person whom the world hates and would like to crush. Thus Jesus told His disciples, "You know that it [the world] hated me before it hated you" (Jn. 15:18; cf. Mt. 10:22; 22:9; Mk. 13:13; Lk. 21:17). Abel was the first martyr in history; the first person to die for the faith. Matthew Henry writes, "Abel's death has not only no curse in it, but it has a crown in it; so admirably well is the property of death altered that it is not only rendered innocent and inoffensive to those that die in Christ, but honorable and glorious to those that die for him. Let us not think it strange concerning the fiery trial, or shrink if we be called to resist unto blood; for we know there is a crown of life for all that are faithful unto death."<sup>17</sup>

Third, as the firstborn son that fails, follows Satan ("Cain was of the wicked one"; 1 Jn. 3:12) and rejects Jehovah, Cain becomes a paradigmatic figure of opposition to God and His people. He is the head of the reprobate line and the beginning of the seed of the woman who covenantally is the seed of the serpent. The pattern of the firstborn son being reprobate and hostile to the godly line has been established. Abraham's firstborn son Ishmael was cast out of the covenant community by God and was said by Jehovah to be "a wild man [whose] hand shall

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 1:40.

be against every man” (Gen. 16:11). Paul says that Ishmael was born “according to the flesh” and “persecuted him [Isaac] that was born according to the Spirit” (Gal. 4:29). The Ishmaelites are pictured as hostile to the Israelites in 1 Chronicles 5:19. Isaac’s firstborn son Esau also rejected the faith and was an enemy of God’s people. He did not trust in Jehovah to provide for his daily needs and sold his birthright to his brother Jacob. Esau married pagan women (Gen. 26:34, 35; 36:1, 2); hated his brother for his acquiring his birthright and blessing and wanted to kill him (Gen. 27:41). His descendants, the Edomites, were a wicked people who were the enemies of Israel. The great antithesis between the elect and non-elect, the saved and unsaved, the followers of God and the followers of Satan starts with Cain. “As Abel leads the van in the noble army of martyrs (Matt. 23:35), so Cain stands in the front of the ignoble army of persecutors, Jude 11.”<sup>18</sup> This conflict will last until Christ returns and sends His people into paradise and the reprobate into the lake of fire.

Fourth, Cain’s great wickedness is seen in the act of murder itself. He “rose up against Abel.” In this context the “verb rise (*qum*) does not mean the literal rising from a sitting posture but, in a more general sense ‘to undertake something’; therefore ‘attack,’ in this case.”<sup>19</sup> From a posture of outward peace and friendliness, Cain without warning attacked Abel his brother and killed him. The word “killed” (*hārag*) is “the common verb meaning ‘to murder intentionally’ and is to be distinguished from the one mentioned in the sixth commandment (*rāsah*, Exod. 20:13), which also encompasses manslaughter.”<sup>20</sup> Premeditated murder is one of the most heinous crimes in God’s sight. Jehovah alone creates life and so only He has the right to determine which actions are so evil they allow the taking of life. Cain’s ghastly act of fratricide was a supreme act of human autonomy and a kind of satanically inspired death penalty. Cain decided that Abel deserved to die because he was righteous. How Abel is killed is not specified. Given the fact that Abel’s blood spilled on the ground, he was probably beaten with a farming implement.

## Divine Investigation and Judgment

After the crime, God investigates what occurred by asking questions, noting the witnesses and pronouncing judgment: “Then the LORD said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ And He said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground. So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth’” (vs. 9-12). Jehovah’s opening question is rhetorical, for God already knows the answer (v. 10). The Lord is *not* seeking new information but an acknowledgment of guilt on Cain’s part. Instead of immediately tearing into Cain judicially, Jehovah treats him as a child and indirectly

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 204.

<sup>20</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, 230.

attempts to elicit a confession of murder. This is the second cross examination in Genesis. The “where are you” of 3:9 corresponds to the “where is...your brother,” here. In the first, Adam is evasive and makes weak excuses, yet exudes guilt and shame for his sin. Here Cain acts hardened and proud. He not only tells a blatant lie directly to God, “I don’t know”; but also acts disrespectfully to God with the smart aleck come back, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” This is a prime example of the blindness and wickedness of the human heart. Did Cain really think he could fool Jehovah, who is omnipresent and omniscient? Did he think God could be outwitted or diverted from the truth with a clever exaggeration? There is not a shred of guilt, or contrition, or confession in Cain’s answer, but only arrogance, self-righteousness and a repudiation of reality. We see, once again, why Cain was so unwilling to acknowledge the necessity of the Savior to come by offering a blood sacrifice. “Thus in Cain, the devil was both a murderer and a liar from the beginning. See how sinners’ minds are blinded, and their hearts hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.”<sup>21</sup> It is the tendency of all hardened sinners to mock God rather than acknowledge guilt. There are multitudes of people who will not understand the depth and gravity of their sins until they wake up in hell or lie prostrate in terror and despair before the judgment seat of Christ. Is it not better to humble oneself, acknowledge one’s multitude of sins and bow the knee to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior *now, in this life* than to act proudly, deny or ignore the truth and bow the knee at the final judgment *after it is too late*?

The expression “Am I my brother’s keeper” could be paraphrased, “Am I the shepherd’s (*sōmēr* meaning “guardian” or “shepherd” [cf. Ex. 22:6, 9; 1 Sam. 17:20]) shepherd?” It either has the meaning of, “Am I responsible to keep watch over my brother all the time” which is an impossible task; or simply means “That, in his judgment, he was not responsible for caring for his brother or looking out for his well-being.”<sup>22</sup> In either case, Cain is evading his responsibility and defying the heavenly Judge. As Abel’s elder brother, he did have a solemn responsibility to watch over or care for Abel as best he could. According to biblical law, a man’s brother has an obligation to assist him in a time of need (Lev. 25:48). Moreover, a brother was strongly encouraged by the law to provide a continuation of his dead brother’s name through levirate marriage (cf. Deut. 25:5-10). A loving concern for our brothers (especially our younger, more immature and vulnerable brothers) is a biblical duty that we must not ignore. If those of us who have younger brothers do not act on their behalf physically and spiritually and make stupid excuses for our gross neglect, we are in effect speaking like Cain.

In verse 10 God moves from an interrogation to a strong declaration of guilt: “What have you done?” This kind of a question has the meaning, “You know exactly what you have done!” Jehovah is not seeking information but is rebuking Cain for his behavior. The narrative comes to a climax as God judicially takes the gloves off in order to startle the guilty sinner into reality. God then notes a witness to the crime in a manner that emphasizes the heinous nature of his sin: “Your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground” (v. 10b). “The word used here for *crying*, *sāaq*, frequently describes the cry of the oppressed, be they the afflicted in Sodom and

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<sup>21</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:41.

<sup>22</sup> G. Ch. Alders, *Genesis*, 1:124.

Gomorrah (Gen. 18:13), the overworked and exhausted Israelites in Egypt (Exod. 3:7), or the afflicted stranger, widow, or orphan (Exod. 22:21-24). *sāaq* is associated with the groans of an innocent victim who is brutalized and harassed.”<sup>23</sup> The blood contains the life essence and thus is the perfect metaphor for a violent, unjust, unrecompensed murder. The law of God makes it perfectly clear that murder is so wicked and serious that the land will become polluted and suffer judgment if murderers are not found and put to death; or, if the murderer is not discovered, remedied by sacrifice (i.e. atonement) (cf. Num. 35:9-34; Deut. 19:1-13; 21:1-9). This metaphor of blood representing the victims of murder, or martyrdom and injustice crying out to God for justice is carried over into the New Testament (e.g., see Rev. 6:9, 10; Lk. 18:7, 8). Since there were no witnesses to this crime except God, the blood of the victim soaked into the ground cries out to Jehovah for vindication and just vengeance. The blood and God are the two witnesses for the prosecution, with God as both prosecutor and judge. Cain is guilty of shedding innocent blood and thus must be punished. In God’s universe evil acts have consequences. The person cannot commit murder with impunity. One’s crime will find him out in this life and/or the life to come.

## The Sentence

In verses 11 and 12 God tells Cain his sentence, “So now you are cursed from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. When you till the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. A fugitive and a vagabond you shall be on the earth.” There are a number of noteworthy features regarding the proclamation of judgment.

First, Cain is addressed more sharply and sternly than Adam in chapter 3. In Genesis 3, God curses the ground (v. 17); while here He curses Cain directly. The serious nature of cursing Cain indicates that the judgment must fit the crime. Although Jehovah allowed the righteous to be martyred by the wicked, He will not allow the wicked to escape justice. It may be asked why God did not impose the death penalty on Cain for an act which requires death in the moral law. It seems that Jehovah did not want or require Cain’s own parents to put him to death. The standing law of capital punishment which applies to all men and all ages was sovereignly suspended in this case for God’s own purposes. God does not simply wipe out the ungodly line which He had every right to do; but, allows it to continue and flourish throughout the ages to come. In this age God wants the antithesis between the godly people and the ungodly seed to continue. Only the final judgment will bring Cain’s kind to a complete end. (In our era of lawless infidelity when civil magistrates rage against the truth, the death penalty for murder has largely been suspended. A nation that allows murderers to live is ripe for judgment.)

Second, Cain is cursed away from the land. He will be banished away from the civilized, cultivated area outside the east gate of Eden. There is a just sense of irony in this judgment, “Cain had tilled the land. He had offered the fruit of the land, and given the land his brother’s blood to drink: but from the land the blood cries against him, for which the land refuses him its

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<sup>23</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17*, 231.

fruit, so he is banned from the land.”<sup>24</sup> He had placed his trust in the fruit of the land (his own works) instead of the blood sacrifice, and then polluted the land with innocent blood; consequently, this land must vomit him out. He is essentially excommunicated from the covenant community. (Later in Israel’s history, the people would follow the fertility cults because they believed that it would guarantee the fruit of the land. The result was that they were cast out of the land of Israel and went into captivity.)

The land outside the gate of Eden which had been productive for Cain will no longer yield its strength. That is, God will curse Cain economically by drastically limiting the land’s yield of food. When God would bring sanctions against Israel for their sin and idolatry, He would often bring a drought upon the land by withholding the rainfall (e.g., see Deut. 24:23-24; 1 Kgs. 8:35; 17:1, 7; etc.). This case, however, likely involves a more direct supernatural intervention, in that Adam, a tiller of the soil, is not affected. The ground before was cursed to Adam (Gen. 3:17-19), but because Cain’s sin was so egregious and occurred after a special warning from Jehovah, the ground now is doubly or specially cursed for Cain. “The wickedness of the wicked brings a curse upon all they do and all they had (Deut. 28:15; etc.), and this curse and embitters all they have and disappoints them in all they do.”<sup>25</sup> Sin is often sweet to the taste and brings a moment of pleasure or satisfaction; but, it is very bitter in the belly and causes far more pain and trouble than its fleeting moment of enjoyment. If a people or nation wants continued economic prosperity from God, they must acknowledge Jesus Christ as King and submit themselves to His moral laws revealed in Scripture.

Third, the special curse on the ground is likely directly related to the second aspect of Cain’s judgment; that from now on he is to be “a fugitive and a vagabond...on the earth” (12b). The two Hebrew words are likely a hendiadys (i.e. an expression of a singular idea by two nouns side-by-side or connected by and [we drink from *cups and gold* for *golden cups*]). Cain will be a restless wanderer or wandering fugitive. Both Hebrew words used here emphasize movement and instability. Each describes the movement back and forth of things like reeds or tree limbs in the wind (Jdg. 9:9; 1 Kgs. 14:15).

The first of these words, *nā*, is a participle of *nua*, which means “shake, reel, stagger, wander.” It may refer to small-scale movements, such as the visible movement of Hannah’s lips as she prayed (1 Sam. 1:13), or the wondering path of a blind man (Lam. 4:14). Or it may encompass movements on a larger scale, such as the wanderings of homeless vagabonds (Lam. 4:15), or those who travel far and wide in search of water in periods of drought (Amos 4:8)... The second word, *nād*, is a participle of *nud*, which means “wanderer, moved to and fro, flee” (see e.g., Jer. 4:1; 49:30; 50:3). The two verbs are used beside each other again only in Isa. 24:20a: ‘the earth staggers [*nua*] like a drunken man, it sways [*nud*] like a hut,’ a parallelism that clearly indicates the aimlessness of the movement conveyed by these two verbs.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Gunkel, as quoted in Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 107.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:42.

<sup>26</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, 232.

The point of the curse and its effect is that Cain is to be removed from God's special presence, outside the gate of Eden; cut off from his own family which at this time was the covenant community or visible church; removed from his source of income or sustenance; and, thus, Cain is compelled to wander. He must abandon his home and roots and leave behind the simple, satisfying, godly life which he could have led if he had faith and was content to obey God. Instead, he must move out and seek his sustenance and satisfaction abroad, at a good distance from his earthly home, far away from the presence of his father's God. Cain's banishment is a warning of the ultimate casting out into hell of unbelieving wicked men on the day of judgment. All guilty men who reject the atoning death of Jesus Christ are in a sense fugitives who are always seeking to hide their own guilt; and also wanderers who move from one worldly fad and sinful delight to another to flee from God's reality. The person who rejects Yahweh and Jesus Christ is rootless: philosophically, ethically and practically. He is lost in a wilderness of meaninglessness, vanity and satanic deceptions. He is chased and afflicted by his own guilt, blindness and stupidity. While, due to extraordinary circumstances, Cain was spared the death penalty, he did experience a severe kind of excommunication. In the many lonely hours of wandering, the recollection of his family and his brutal crime would come before his mind to torment him, because he was an unrepentant wretch.

### Cain's Protest

Unlike Adam who accepts his punishment with silence, Cain bitterly complains against his sentence: "And Cain said to the LORD, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me'" (vs. 13-14). Cain's response implies that he thinks that God's judgment is unreasonable and far too harsh. It is obvious from Cain's reaction that he has not humbled himself before God or repented of his sin. A humbled and contrite heart does not complain about the severity of God's punishment but rather accepts what God has done. A true believer understands that Jehovah is always fair and just. (e.g., While the wicked unrepentant criminals who hung on the cross with our Lord mocked Him, penitent thief acknowledged justice, "we receive the due reward of our deeds" [Lk. 23:41]. Note also David's confession, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your loving kindness; according to the multitude of your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight—that You may be found just when You speak and blameless when You judge" [Ps. 51:1-4]. David explicitly justifies God in His sentence against him.)

Although Cain obviously believed in God's existence, for he spoke directly to God and vice versa; he, nevertheless, did not trust in the God of the Bible, for he believed that Jehovah could be untrustworthy, unfair, unjust and unnecessarily vindictive. Cain is a perfect

representative of pagan unbelievers who create a god of their own imagination and then stand in judgment over their false image of Jehovah. Cain's great sin of murder was further aggravated in his reproach of God's justice. Like the typical wicked unbeliever, Cain makes light of his sin but is quick to pass judgment on God who cannot sin nor do evil. The world's first child is a revelation of the great depravity that is now the fabric of man's being. He had no concern or love of his own brother whom he killed without mercy, but is full of self-love and self-pity, demanding kindness and mercy from Jehovah.

Cain, like all blind unregenerate sinners, is focused on his punishment while he ignores the sin that caused it. Although God's punishment was kind given the nature of Cain's crime, he argues that it is greater than he can bear. This is an indirect appeal for Jehovah to alter His sentence. According to the *lex talionis* concept of justice ("an eye for an eye, tooth for tooth, life for life") God could have struck Cain dead on the spot and sent him directly to hell. But God had other plans. No matter what a guilty sinner may think about his punishment, he must endure it whether he likes it or not. "My punishment is greater than I can bear' will be the language of the lost in the Lake Fire. The awful lot of the unsaved will be unbearable, and yet it will have to be endured for ever."<sup>27</sup>

Cain describes his punishment as containing four elements. The first three reflect God's statement in verses 11 and 12, while the fourth is something Cain believes will be a consequence of the other punishments. Cain knows that he is being driven away from the land. The land near the gate of Eden that the family had developed and cultivated would be off-limits to Cain. This land was fruitful and productive. Cain would move to less productive areas and be forced by circumstances (at least for quite some time) to live the life of a Bedouin instead of a farmer.

He also notes that he is being driven out further away from God's special presence: "I shall be hidden from Your face" (v. 14). Although Cain probably does not realize it, this is the most serious part of his judgment. As an aspect of his excommunication, he is cut off from the place of worship near the gate of Eden and farther removed from the garden of God (the archetype of all later sanctuaries). Although as an unregenerate, wicked man, Cain did not have any desire for a deep communion with God; nevertheless, because of his training as a child he knew that being kept from God was a serious punishment. This is further evidence that Cain did not have faith in God and did not repent, for David committed adultery and premeditated murder and yet was fully restored to fellowship with God and had access to the prescribed place of worship and approach.

Tragically, most unrepentant sinners go about their lives completely unaware that their sins have separated them from God; that even now the wrath of a righteous, just and holy God abides on them (Jn. 3:36). If a sinner does not acknowledge his guilt *in this life* and look solely to Jesus Christ and His redemptive work for salvation, then on the day of judgment his banishment from God's presence will be final, eternal, and irrevocable. The glorified Savior Himself whom they rejected will proclaim the fearful sentence: "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Mt. 7:23). "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur W. Pink, *Gleanings in Genesis* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1922, 1950), 62.

for the devil and his angels” (Mt. 25:41). “And anyone not written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15). “The cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). If you do not repent and look to Christ as He has been revealed in the Bible now; but, instead, continue in your current unrepentant, unbelieving life, then you will forever be cut off from God’s light, love, blessing, care, and all hope of grace or fellowship. No wonder hell is a place of darkness (Mt. 22:13; Jude 1:13), where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (Mt. 13:40-42; 22:13).<sup>28</sup>

In addition, Cain whines about being a wandering fugitive or vagabond on the earth. There is no rest for the wicked. He was not content with his station in a godly civilized setting, so he must continually shift and stray about the land east of Eden (v. 16). Cain does not hate sin, but he does hate the consequences of sin. The boldness with which he first faced God is deflated. The arrogant sinner with upturned nose has been reduced to a cowardly, shaking child. The Bible makes it very clear that “the way of the transgressor is hard” (Prov. 13:15).

Cain’s complaint comes to a climax with his greatest fear: that someone will come and avenge Abel’s death by slaying him, the guilty murderer. Bible critics, skeptics and modernists see in this concern an unhistorical mistake in that they think Cain’s complaint assumes a land full of people. They argue that this is strong evidence that the Cain-Abel narrative was a story from much later in earth’s history; that a redactor conveniently placed it next to the Adam and Eve story for dramatic effect. All such thinking is stupid, unbelieving nonsense. Adam and Eve lived for centuries and had many children. Cain and Seth in that unusual time would have had to marry their sisters. Cain has a deep fear, no doubt rooted in his non-atoned guilt that one of his brothers will come looking for him and strike him down for his wicked crime. Guilt and the alienation from both God and man that such crimes bring have Cain looking over his shoulder with dread. “The wicked flee when no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion” (Prov. 28:1). Bridges writes, “The *wicked* may appear *bold* in facing danger, so long as they avoid serious thought, and stupefy conscience. But when conscience is roused, guilt is the parent of fear.... The wicked flee, not only when their enemies pursue, but also *when no one pursues*. Yet isn’t conscience an invisible *pursuer*, following close, the herald of the wrath of God.... In unwelcome thoughts of judgment to come, conscience has turned pale at the question—‘What will become of the godless man and the sinner’ [1 Pet. 4:18]?”<sup>29</sup> “Unpardoned sin fills men with continual terrors.... It is better to fear and not sin than to sin and then fear.”<sup>30</sup> The fear is ironic

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<sup>28</sup> Before the last judgment, the souls of those who died without Christ suffer in hell without their physical bodies. Their physical bodies are rotting in the earth. “For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). Immediately before the final judgment both soul and body are reunited during the resurrection of the dead. “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth; those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (Jn. 5:28-29). Then both body and soul “shall be cast out from the favorable presence of God, and the glorious fellowship with Christ, His saints, and all His holy angels, into hell, to be punished with unspeakable torments, both of body and soul, with the devil and his angels forever” (*Westminster Larger Catechism*, answer to question 89).

<sup>29</sup> Charles Bridges, Edited and Revised by George F. Santa, *A Modern Study in the Book of Proverbs* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1978), 622.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:43.

given the circumstances. “He who turned on one of his relatives now must watch out for any of his relatives. The ‘avenger of blood,’ the one who seeks retribution of justice against the criminal, may be a family member.”<sup>31</sup>

## God’s Promise to Cain

In this final scene Jehovah reveals that He can be very kind and can even extend *temporary* mercies toward the wicked: “And the LORD said to him, ‘Therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.’ And the LORD set a mark upon Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him” (v. 15). God does not soften or alter His pronounced judgment upon Cain one iota. But the Lord does reassure Cain that He will protect him from blood vengeance of any relatives who may encounter him. This is in keeping with God’s original sentence of judgment which did not involve death penalty in this case. Since Jehovah’s judgment against Cain would have been public knowledge to Adam and Eve and any brothers or sisters, it would have been unlawful for anyone to kill Cain anyway. The Lord is not simply giving Cain a divine promise of protection but is upholding His own sentence. God wanted Cain to live and raise up an ungodly line as an antithesis to the righteous seed. “Condemned prisoners are under special protection of the law; those that are appointed sacrifices to public justice must not be sacrificed to private vengeance. God having said in Cain’s case, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay*, it would have been a daring usurpation for any man to take the sword out of God’s hand....”<sup>32</sup>

God backs up His word of protection with a promise to take vengeance on any avenger: “vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold.” The expression “sevenfold” does *not* mean that the Lord will kill seven family members of the avenger which would be unjust and violate the biblical principle of *lex talionis*. It rather is a poetic way of speaking of a full retribution (cf. Ps. 12:6). The number seven can be used in Scripture of “fullness” or “completeness.” God essentially tells Cain not to worry, for his murder would be definitely and fully avenged.

God also places a mark upon Cain so that he can be easily identified by would-be avengers. Presumably, the potential killers would see the sign, be reminded of God’s promise of vengeance on any avengers and would not carry out any plans of violence. We are not told what the sign was and there is no point in speculation as to what it was. All we know is that it had to be something visible and fairly obvious to be effective. There is no biblical evidence that Cain was ever attacked. Ironically, while the visible sign would function as a badge of protection, it would also permanently remind Cain that he was under a curse for his crime. It would serve as a constant reminder of his excommunication, his isolation from the true people of God and from Jehovah’s special loving presence. Cain went through life with the visible mark of infamy and disgrace which would make all godly people keep their distance from this dangerous apostate.

## Cain’s Departure

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<sup>31</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis 1-17*, 233.

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 1:43.

The story that began with Cain approaching God on his own terms ends with him leaving the Lord's presence both as a judgment and as his choice: "Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden" (v. 16). Cain had attempted to form his own syncretistic religion by approaching God through humanism (i.e. through human autonomy in salvation and worship). While Cain had a certain fear toward his judgment, he disdained repentance and reconciliation even more. Therefore, in accordance with his humanistic religion, he sets off on his own to live independent of God and His law-word. "He willingly renounced God [and the true] religion, and was content to forgo its privileges, so that he might not be under its precepts. He forsook Adam's family and altar, and cast off all pretensions to the fear of God, and never came among good people, nor attempted on God's ordinances, anymore."<sup>33</sup> Cain moves to a land whose very name, "*Nod*," means "wandering." The account of Cain's line that follows reveals the satanic line of humanity which seeks a proud, self-sufficient society. This new humanistic culture is the essence of what the New Testament calls the world. The name "*Nod*" is appropriate, for those who reject God and Jesus Christ are left to wander in the darkness of humanism: religiously, philosophically, ethically and socially. The unbeliever believes that he is free and independent, but he is nothing more than a slave of sin and his own wicked lusts. He is destined to be cast out into outer darkness.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

