

Cain & Abel, the first Murder: Genesis 4:1-17 Hebrews 11:4 .

Portions adapted from "Murder Most Foul Series, by Victor Yap @ Sermon Central.Com

There is a beautiful Hebrew legend of how the location of the Jerusalem temple was determined. Two brothers lived side by side on adjoining lands in the past. One was the head of a large family, and the other lived alone. One night, the former lay awake and thought: "My brother lives alone, he has not the companionship of wife and children to cheer his heart as I have. While he sleeps, I will carry some of my sheaves into his field.?"

At the same hour, the other brother reasoned: "My brother has a large family, and his necessities are greater than mine. As he sleeps, I will put some of my sheaves on his side of the field.?" Thus the two brothers went out, each carrying out his purpose and each laden with sheaves; they met at the dividing line. There they cried and embraced each other.

And that's the very spot the altar of the Jerusalem temple was placed years later (7,700 Illustrations # 3214, Paul Lee Tan).



Sadly it is the exact opposite of that story we must deal with today. The first two sons born to A&E, were Cain and Abel. The older Cain perhaps worked with and then followed his father's lead as a gardener, while the younger was sent out to the fields to become a shepherd.

Someone once said: "*Sin never stands still- it always continues to grow.*" Perhaps Adam and Eve's marital conflicts which began in Eden were passed along to the brothers as sibling rivalry. For whatever the reasons, the first recorded sin of humanity was disobedience against God; the next was fratricide (the killing of one's brother).

Because Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God while Cain's was not, the outcome was jealousy and envy, anger and hatred leading to murder and cover up.

What did God see in Abel's offering that was missing in Cain's? Why was Abel commended a righteous man, while Cain was branded as being of the devil? (Hebrews 11:4, 1 John 3:12).

The details are so few that we can't be sure, but there are hints that Cain's path to murder probably started long before this rejected sacrifice.

Our story begins with the birth of two brothers. Genesis 4 picks up where Genesis 3 ends. Sin had entered God's perfect world. Adam and Eve no longer live in the paradise God had made for them. Their children were born and raised where all families live —outside of Eden. Adam and Eve had left the garden but they hadn't lost hope. God had promised that someday a child would be born who would change the course of history. He would undo the evil that had been loosed (Gen 3:15).

We don't know all that was going through Eve's mind. But when her first child was born, she seemed to think this was God's promised future serpent crushing son. She named him **Cain**, a

word which meant “acquired” because she saw her first born son as God’s gift and perhaps hoped that he would be the one to undo their sin and help return them to an easier life in the garden.

But by the time her second son came along, for some reason, Eve no longer voices that same hope. She names her next son **Abel**, a name meaning something like “nothingness, vanity, futility.”



I wonder how Eve’s change of attitude affected her two boys. We will never know for sure. Perhaps Cain grew up pampered, proud, entitled and convinced he couldn’t do anything wrong. Maybe Abel couldn’t do anything right, the object of his parents’ frustrations. We do know that Cain stays home to work the family farm, while his younger brother gets sent out in the fields to herd sheep.

Two brothers born of the same parents and raised in the same family yet so different on the inside. Apparently this is such a common family dynamic that our Bible repeats this cautionary tale several times, Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, the Prodigal Son and the Elder Brother. Notice that each time God sees something in one brother which is absent in his sibling.

Our story then jumps forward at least a couple decades. The two boys have grown up and now go to church on their own. Worship is hard wired into the human spirit. Our need to meet with God started in the garden. Sin twisted but didn’t eliminate it. Men and women are still driven to believe in something bigger than ourselves. We either worship the creator, the creation, or some reflection of ourselves. We cannot believe in nothing. As St. Augustine noted, “*Our heart is restless until it rests in God.*”

Apparently A&E had continued to meet with God to worship and converse, perhaps coming to the edge of the garden and bringing the boys along. Cain and Abel knew what was expected of them and that worship is hollow and empty without sacrifice. So now as they approach God for themselves they each bring an offering.



Cain the farmer brought the fruit of his harvest. Abel the herdsman killed and slaughtered the first born of his flocks, bringing the best he had in worship. We are not told why, but God was pleased with Abel’s offering and not with Cain’s; most importantly, Cain knew it! Why the difference in God’s response?

First, the two offerings may have represented different intentions behind Cain and Abel’s coming to worship. Cain offered the fruit of his labors which should have been acceptable as an offering of thanksgiving. The Hebrew people were instructed to annually bring such thank offerings to God in acknowledgement of His ownership and gracious provision for them in the Promised Land.

But Abel sacrificed a life, the first born and best of his flock, which could have been either a thank offering or one asking forgiveness of his sin. The Hebrew people were also instructed to

offer an annual animal sacrifice asking such forgiveness. This is also the first sacrifice that A&E participated in; after which God clothed them in those animal skins as a reminder that another's death had paid their penalty. My point is that the giving of a thank offering without a first penitential sacrifice may have emptied Cain's offering of any value.

It is sort of like that old joke about the pig and the chicken. Having read a sign requesting produce to be given for a local benefit ham and egg breakfast, the chicken suggested they help out. "*That's easy for you to say,*" replied the pig. "*For you that's a donation. For me it's a sacrifice.*"

The Old Testament insists that "*without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins.*" The entire Hebrew system of sacrifices (the Passover, the Day of Atonement, and the rest) were in anticipation of the coming true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ; Eve's only heir who would truly be able to crush the serpent's head. Thus beginning in the Garden of Eden God was preparing a people who understood the seriousness of sin. Sin demands life—the sinners or a substitute. A bloodless sacrifice cheapens sin.

Maybe that was the problem with Cain's offering from his harvest; indicating his refusal to admit any need for forgiveness, but rather believing that the work of his hands should be sufficient to build his relationship with God; which is an offering God will always reject. As the Bible has clearly taught from beginning to end, that our forgiveness, our salvation, is provided by God's Grace, which we can only accept by faith; it can never be attained through our works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

By faith Abel offered to God
a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's.
Through this he received approval as **righteous**,
Hebrews 11:4

From our second scripture text of the morning, we do get a clue that this was the reason that Abel's offering was accepted while Cain's was rejected. Abel came in **faith** apparently **asking forgiveness** and was **declared righteous**. Cain came without faith declaring himself worthy by his own efforts and was told by God that such wouldn't do.

Faith versus faithlessness, is once again the clue to both everything that has gone wrong in our world and how to one day make it right again.

Rabbi Simlai in the third century tracked the history of the commandments in the Bible. He noted that Moses gave 613 commands- 365 yes' and 248 no's. King David then reduced them to eleven in Psalms 15, followed by the prophet Isaiah (33:14, 15) who condensed them to six, Later the prophet Micah asked a question and shortened them to three: *And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God* (6:8). Then last of all, Habakkuk summarized them all to one, namely - "**The righteous will live by his faith**" (Hab. 2:4). (7,700 Illustrations # 1495).

This then became the central message of Paul's letter to the Romans (1:17). None of our own efforts at righteous living will ever be sufficient to pay the penalty of our sin. To be declared righteous before God we must come to him in faith, asking and trusting God to do what He has promised He will do. Where Adam's lack of faith caused humanity's exile from our original relationship with God, his less honored son Abel, like Abraham many years later, came to God **simply by faith**. And for their faith both of these men were not only declared righteous, they were also included Hebrews, chapter 11, the **Heroes of Faith** Hall of Fame, as examples for us to follow.

For without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek him. Hebrews 11:6

Abel came in faith; Cain had not. But there is yet more that we need to learn from this story.

The Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry?
If you do well, will you not be accepted?
Genesis 4:6-7

Did you notice that while God rejected Cain's offering – which the Bible says "made Cain "very angry" – **God had not rejected Cain**. In fact God began reasoning with him, attempting to teach Cain why the one faith given offering had been accepted and the other faithless one was rejected. Cain was told that he could easily turn this rejection around by coming back to God with the right attitude in his heart.

And, like his parents before him, God even warned Cain of the consequence of the murderous sin he was contemplating (remember that God always sees what is in your heart before it comes out in action). God told Cain that, like some wild animal, sin was crouching right beside him – eager to dominate him, to devour his life – and if Cain did not master it, it would master him (4:7).

There is another clue hinting that something much more than a rejected offering is what turned Cain into a murderer. Somewhere in his youth Cain had grown a proud and vengeful nature which finally came to a climax when God accepted his brother's offering over his own. The Bible says that the root cause of Cain's anger was that - for whatever reason - **he hated his brother** and had thus already long ago murdered him in his heart. The Apostle John would write....

We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother ... All who hate a brother or sister are murderers 1 John 3:12-15

We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. ... We know that we

have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers. and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. 1 John 3:12-15

For whatever reason, Cain brought his offering while still harboring hatred for his brother Abel; this alone would disqualify his offering. As Jesus would later teach:

when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:23-24

So like his brother, Cain had brought an offering, but he did so without faith, without confessing his sins, and while continuing to harbor hatred of his brother in his heart. Anyone of these reasons would have disqualified his offering before God.

But the scariest part of this story was that Cain's hatred had already so deeply twisted his thinking that even God could not change his mind. Eve was talked into disobedience by the serpent, but **Cain could not be talked out of murder even by God!** How ironic that the son Eve had hoped would undo the curse and bring their family back to Eden, grew up to take the human race even further into exile from God.



As you know rather than choosing to do the right thing, Cain nursed his anger and his hatred until the opportune moment when he could kill his brother as they say "*in cold blood.*" This murder was not done in a fit of uncontrolled passion, rather it was a calculated carefully planned act. Luring Abel out to the fields where he thought they were alone, Cain then slew his unsuspecting brother and walked away as if nothing had happened.

At first when challenged by God, Cain would not even admit to knowing where Abel was; "How should I know where he is, *am I my brother's keeper?*" Faced with such unremorseful, unrepentant denial of sin, God had no choice but to drive Cain further away. Every sin causes more death, our further separation God and others.

So now you are cursed...
When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.'
Genesis 4:11-12

The consequences were swift: Cain would work endlessly, wander aimlessly, and live fearfully for the rest of his life. Up until this time Adam could at least raise food by the sweat of his brow, but now Cain could not even do that; the ground would no longer yield food for him. He and his descendants would spend their days scrounging and fighting ... looking over their shoulders, watching their backs, murderous and vengeful, without remorse.

Then Cain went away from the presence of the Lord, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden. Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son. (Genesis 4:16-17)

God had banished Cain to a nomadic life, but the penalty was quickly ignored. Cain responded by rejecting God and settling down. His descendants became tent dwelling cattle herders, musicians, and metal workers. Three generations after Cain, his great great grandson Lamech not only had taken up polygamy (having two wives). But he bragged of killing a young man simply for striking at him. Pastor theologian William Ward Ayer was right: "*We are all dangerous folks without God's controlling hand.*" The steep downward path of Cain's descendants would quickly lead to the necessity of the flood, when God would decide that it was best to wipe out almost all of humanity and start over.

But what about God's promise to Eve of the future son to undo sin. If you learn nothing else from your Bible, at least learn that **God always keeps His promises.**

Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him." Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time men began to call on the name of the LORD. (4:26).

The godly descendants of Seth would continue "**call on the name of the Lord'** even as the rest humanity fell deeper in sin. One day God would call for one of Seth's heirs, a man named Noah, to build a boat, for just a few humans and all the animals in order to continue bringing His promise forward. But that is a story for another day.

Russian author, Fyodor Dostoevsky, said: "*If God does not exist, everything is permissible.*" Humanity left to itself, lives only for self, in the dark intentions of an alienated mind, the desires of the flesh, and whatever can be accomplished by its own hands. While only **faith, brotherly love** and **godly hope** can please God.

How about you?

What did you bring with you to meet God today?

Did you come in pride offering only your accomplishments?

Romans 2:5, 1 Timothy 1:5

Or did you come in faith asking God to lead you forward?

Hebrews 11:6

Did you come today, still harboring anger or hatred against another?

Or did you come to God with a broken and contrite heart?

Psalms 51

Have you reconciled with your brother, your sister?

Matthew 5:24

Are you thankful for what God has given you?

Philippians 4:6

Do you do good and share with others?

Hebrews 13:16

And finally, in gratitude for the salvation and restoration offered you by Christ Jesus,

are you living as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God?

Romans 12:1-2

Let us pray asking God to forgive our sins, heal our hatreds and our times of faithlessness, and to continue leading us forward in His name.