

# **“In Center Stage – Cain”**

**Genesis 4:1-26**

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“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players,” wrote Shakespeare. “They all have their exits and their entrances, and one man in his time plays many parts.” When it is time for us to come into this world and take center stage, the story of our life forever will be written in stone to who we were, and will serve as a witness to the choices we made for Jesus Christ. Did we go God’s way or our own way?

Remember those familiar words from English Lit 101? Shakespeare was right: we have many roles to play in life as from time to time we relate to various people and confront different circumstances. The important thing is that we let God write the script, choose the cast, and direct the action. If we disregard Him and try to produce the drama ourselves, the story will have a tragic ending.

That’s what ruined Cain, the first human baby born on the stage of Planet Earth: He ignored God’s script, “did his own thing,” and made a mess out of it. Genesis 4 focuses the spotlight on Cain; he’s mentioned thirteen times, and seven times Abel is identified as “his (Cain’s) brother.” As you consider Cain’s life and some of the roles he played, you will better understand how important it is for us to know God and do His will.

## **The Brother**

Genesis 4:1-2a <sup>1</sup>And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. <sup>2</sup>And she again bare his brother Abel. And <sup>a</sup>Abel was <sup>b</sup>a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

God commanded our first parents to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth” (1:28), and they obeyed this mandate (5:4). While it’s true that the building of a family isn’t the only purpose for marriage, and not every marriage is blessed with children, it’s also true that children are a precious gift from God (33:5; 48:9; Ps. 127:3) and should be welcomed with joy. The Jewish people in the Old Testament and the Christians in the first century church would be appalled at today’s abortion statistics and the philosophies of the people

who produce them. What we will see with the same set of parents and family up-bringing, one child will choose to go God's way and another his own way.

The name "Cain" sounds like the Hebrew word for "acquired." Eve praised God for helping her through her first pregnancy. After all, this was a new experience for her and she had no doctor or nurse to assist her. Her second pregnancy brought Abel into the world. His name means "breath" and is the word translated "vanity" at least thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. Cain's name reminds us that life comes from God, while Abel's name tells us that life is brief.

Genesis is a "family book" and has a good deal to say about brothers. Being the firstborn son, Cain was special; but because of his sin, he lost everything and Seth took his place (Gen. 4:25). Ishmael was Abraham's firstborn but God bypassed him and chose Isaac. Esau was Isaac's firstborn son, but he was rejected for Jacob; and Jacob's firstborn son Reuben was replaced by Joseph's two sons (49:3-4; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). In fact, God even rearranged the birth order of Joseph's sons (Gen. 48:8-22). Throughout Old Testament history, God's sovereignty is displayed in His choices of those who receive His blessing, for all that we receive is because of God's grace.

Sibling rivalry among brothers is another theme in Genesis. Ishmael persecuted Isaac; Jacob left home so Esau couldn't kill him; and Joseph's brothers intended to kill him but decided to sell him as a slave. When sin entered the human race, it gave us dysfunctional and fractured families, and only the Lord can put families together again. These brothers should be a warning to us all. All of them had God-fearing parents but one brother went his way with God and the other brother went his own way. Psychology today tells us to blame our parents for our negative experiences of who we are and why we are that way, but who is Adam and Eve going to blame?

### **The Worker** (Gen. 4:2b)

As his sons grew older, Adam put them to work in the fields; and it became evident over the years that each boy had his own interests and skills. Cain became a farmer and Abel became a shepherd, the first of many shepherds found in the Bible, including Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his sons, Moses, and David.

Adam certainly taught his sons why they worked: it was a part of God's creation mandate and they were co-laborers with God (1:26-31). Work isn't a punishment from God

because of sin, for Adam had work to do in the Garden before he and his wife yielded to Satan's temptation. The biblical approach to work is that we are privileged to cooperate with God by using His creation gifts for the good of people and the glory of God. (See Col. 3:22-23; 1 Thes. 4:11-12; Ecc. 9:10). Our work serves as an encouraging achievement and what God helped us accomplish.

Work in the will of God isn't a curse; it's a blessing. "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Ex. 20:9, NKJV) was as much a part of God's Law for Israel as His command to rest on the Sabbath Day. The Bible has nothing good to say about idleness or about the idle people who expect others to provide for them (2 Thes. 3:6-15). Before He began His public ministry, Jesus labored as a carpenter (Mark 6:3); and when he wasn't traveling or preaching, the Apostle Paul worked as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1-3).

As Christians, we don't work simply to pay our bills and provide for our needs. We work because it's God's ordained way for us to serve Him and others and thereby glorify God in our lives (1 Cor. 10:31). We don't work just to make a living; we work to make a life, to develop our God-given abilities, and seek to increase the quality and quantity of our labor. Martin Luther told the dairymaids that they could milk cows to the glory of God, and Theodore Roosevelt said that "the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." Perhaps the boys asked their father why their work was so difficult, and Adam had to explain that God had cursed the ground because of his own disobedience. "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" was God's sentence (Gen. 3:17-19, NKJV). And there was no escape. But this question gave Adam the opportunity to remind his sons of God's promise of a Redeemer and a day when creation would be set free from the bondage of sin (v. 15). One day our work and the hardships we had to endure will give way to a new world where our work will be free of any pain.

### **The Worshiper**

Genesis 4:3-7 <sup>3</sup>And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. <sup>4</sup>And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: <sup>5</sup>But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup>And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>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.

God was extending grace to Cain to reconsider what he was about to do in resentment of God and jealousy of his brother. He warned Cain of the terrible consequences and not to open the door to it.

Adam and Eve had learned to worship God during those wonderful days in the Garden before sin had brought its curse to their lives and to the ground. Certainly they taught their children about the Lord and the importance of worshiping Him. Workers need to be worshipers or they may become idolaters, focusing on the gifts and not the Giver, and forgetting that God gives the power to work and gain wealth (Deut. 8:10-20).

When God clothed Adam and Eve with the skins of animals (Gen. 3:21), He taught them about sacrifices and the shedding of blood; and they would have passed this truth along to their children. True worship and salvation are something we must learn from God Himself, for He alone has the right to lay down the rules for approaching Him and pleasing Him in worship.

God accepted Abel and his sacrifice, and perhaps indicated this by sending fire from heaven to consume the animals (Lev. 9:24; 1 Kings 18:38; 1 Chron. 28:26); but He rejected Cain and his sacrifice. It was “by faith” that Abel offered a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain (Heb. 11:4), which means that he had faith in God and was right with God.

By faith Abel came unto God, trusting in the Lord for his salvation in the offering up of a sacrificial lamb for the forgiveness of his sins. He saw in that lamb that someday God would provide Himself with a lamb that would die in his place, taking away the guilt of his sin.

Jesus is the Lamb of God. He died in our place, taking the guilt of our sins upon Himself, paying the price to bring us back into a relationship with God.

Abel knew that he couldn't save himself in his own self-righteousness. He knew he stood in the need of grace to be saved.

Abel came unto the Lord God's way, the one way that God had called sinners to come, to come in faith. The Lord accepted his offering for sin in Christ as an unworthy sinner and was given the free gift of God's salvation.

Cain, in pride refused to believe God and thought he was good enough in himself to be saved. He had a bad attitude and resented God for not accepting him on his own terms. He refused to see himself as a sinner in need of grace and showed contempt toward God for

any guilt of his own. He was a good person and worked hard and didn't do anything wrong deserving of judgment. Instead of trusting in God's way of salvation he would come his own way, trusting in his own self-righteousness. There is only one way to heaven: it's God's way, and it's Jesus.

Jude 11 <sup>11</sup>Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah.

His self-righteousness and pride is seen in offering to God the fruit of his own labors and the work of his own hands. Even though it was the very best and may have looked really good, God rejected it because Cain didn't think he needed a Savior. A lot of people of this world look really good on the outside and when you compare them to other Christians, it seems like they are going to Heaven, but they are not. God knows the heart!

Most people are just like Cain. They believe that by their own good works they can earn salvation and reject any guilt or judgment from God for their sin. The Gospel of Christ and the need of repentance to be saved is an offense to them.

People go to church (Christmas and Easter), go through rituals and do some good things, believing that will get them into Heaven. We could never be good enough no matter how good we have tried to be. We all have sinned before a Holy God and come infinitely short of His perfect righteousness. Grace is the only answer to our sin and as unworthy sinners coming to God for salvation that we don't deserve.

Ephesians 2:8-9 <sup>8</sup>For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: <sup>9</sup>Not of works, lest any man should boast.

Titus 2:11-12 <sup>11</sup>For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, <sup>12</sup>Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Titus 3:5 Not by works of righteousness we have done, but according to His mercy He hath saved us.

The fact that people attend religious meetings and participate in church activities is no proof that they're true believers. It's possible to have "a form of godliness" but never experience its saving power (2 Tim. 3:5). "These people come near to Me with their mouth and honor Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me" (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8). The most costly sacrifices apart from the submission of the heart can never make the worshiper

right before God (Ps. 51:16-17). “The way of Cain” (Jude 11) is the way of self-will and unbelief.

When God rejected his offering, Cain became very angry. (The Hebrew word implies that he was “burning with anger.”) God spoke to him personally and tried to lead him back to the way of faith, but Cain resisted. It’s just like the Lord to give us another opportunity to obey Him, and it’s just like stubborn sinners to refuse His gracious help.

<sup>6</sup>And the LORD said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? And why is thy countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>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.

The Lord warned Cain that temptation was like a fierce beast crouching at the door of his life, and he had better not open the door. It’s dangerous to carry grudges and harbor bitter feelings in our hearts, because all of this can be used by Satan to lead us into temptation and sin. This is what Paul meant when he wrote “neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:27). If we aren’t careful, we can tempt ourselves and bring about our own ruin.

Hebrews 12:14-16 Follow peace with all men and holiness...

## **The Murderer**

Genesis 4:8-10 <sup>8</sup>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. <sup>9</sup>And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper? <sup>10</sup>And he said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground.

We can’t separate our relationship with God from our relationship with our brothers and sisters. (That includes our natural brothers and sisters as well as our brothers and sisters in the Lord.) An unforgiving spirit, such as possessed Cain, hinders worship and destroys our fellowship with God and God’s people (Matt. 5:21-26; 6:14-16). It’s better that we interrupt our worship and get right with a brother than to pollute our sacrifice because we have a bad spirit within.

Matthew 5:21-26 <sup>21</sup>Ye have heard that it was said of them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: <sup>22</sup>But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the

council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. <sup>23</sup>Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; <sup>24</sup>Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. <sup>25</sup>Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. <sup>26</sup>Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing.

When we are offended and we offend others and fail to have a forgiving spirit, our own bitterness becomes a prison in our minds to any joy.

Matthew 6:14-15 <sup>14</sup>For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: <sup>15</sup>But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

When a true believer comes to know Christ he is aware of God's forgiveness at Christ's expense. It is something he doesn't deserve. Even when people have offended us and don't deserve our forgiveness it is for Christ's sake we forgive them. There are many who claim to be Christians who are eaten up with bitterness. They have been offended and refuse to forgive. It is those who have no forgiveness in Christ.

***Murder (v. 8).*** Anger is a powerful emotion that can lead to violence and even murder. Jesus taught that anger in the heart is the moral equivalent of murder with the hands (Matt. 5:21-26). Every year angry drivers cause accidents that kill 28,000 people on the U.S. highways, and angry people who have been fired from their jobs have killed hundreds of innocent people. Had Cain heeded God's warning and accepted His gracious invitation (Gen. 4:7), he would never have become a murderer. Murder in our hearts comes from anger; anger comes from an unforgiving spirit; an unforgiving spirit comes from jealousy; jealousy comes from a resentment of God and resentment comes from pride.

How soon after his worship was rejected did Cain entice his brother away from home and kill him? Was it on the same day, or did he brood over the matter a few days? He probably murdered his brother in his heart many times before he actually committed the deed. He was envious of his brother because of his relationship with God (1 John 3:12), and yet Cain was unwilling to get right with God. When we hate others, it's a sign we're not walking in the light (2:9-11) and that we don't have God's love in our hearts (3:10-16).

**Lying (vv. 9-10).** Cain was a child of the devil (1 John 3:12), which means he was a murderer and a liar (John 8:44). He lied to his brother when he enticed him to the place where he killed him. He lied to himself in thinking that he could do such an evil deed and get away with it. Cain even tried to lie to God and cover up his wicked deeds. No matter how bad we have been, if we are honest with God and admit our sin, we can find forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

There's a definite parallel between God's dealings with Cain in Genesis 4 and His dealings with Adam and Eve in chapter 3. In both instances, the Lord asked questions, not to get information (for He knows everything) but to give the culprits opportunity to tell the truth and confess their sins. In both instances, the sinners were evasive and tried to cover up what they had done, but both times God brought their sins out into the light and they had to admit their guilt.

Adam and Eve had run to hide when they heard God's voice (v. 8), but God heard Abel's voice crying from the ground and Cain couldn't hide. The shedding of innocent blood pollutes the land (Num. 35:30-34) and that blood cries out for justice (Job 16:18; Isa. 26:21; Rev. 6:9-10). Adam and Eve were expelled from the Garden, and Cain became a rejected wanderer in the earth. Abel's blood cried out for vengeance; Jesus' blood is a declaration of forgiveness (Heb. 12).

The more you think about Cain's sin, the more heinous it becomes. The murder wasn't motivated by sudden passion; it was carefully premeditated. Cain didn't kill a stranger in defense; he murdered his own brother out of envy and hatred. Furthermore, Cain did it after being at the altar to worship God and in spite of God's warning and promise. Finally, once the horrible deed was done, Cain took it all very lightly and tried to lie his way out of it. He had no remorse nor felt any repentance. He rejected any guilt before God and had seared his conscience. People today in an anti-God culture and an anti-Gospel attitude toward Christianity, have chosen in their own self-righteousness to reject guilt and despise Christianity for it. "Everybody is good; we don't need a Savior."

### **The Wanderer**

Genesis 4:11-15 <sup>11</sup>And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>And Cain said unto the LORD, My punishment is greater than I can

bear. <sup>14</sup>Behold, thou hast 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 every one that findeth me shall slay me. <sup>15</sup>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.

A vagabond has no home; a fugitive is running from home; a stranger is away from home; but a pilgrim is heading home. “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life” (Deut. 30:19). Cain made the wrong choice, and instead of being a pilgrim in life, he became a stranger and a fugitive, wandering the land.

**God’s Curse (v. 12).** Jehovah had cursed the serpent (3:14) and the ground (v. 17), but He had not cursed Adam and Eve. However, He did curse their son Cain, who was a child of the devil (the serpent). Cain had defiled the ground with his brother’s blood, and now the ground wouldn’t work for him. If Adam toiled and struggled day after day, he would get a harvest (vv. 17-19); but for Cain, there would never be fruit from his labors. So, he couldn’t continue as a farmer. All he could do was wander from place to place and eke out a living.

**Cain’s Regrets (vv. 13-14).** Cain never repented of his sins; his words reveal only remorse and regret. He didn’t say, “My guilt is more than I can bear.” He was concerned only with his punishment, not with his character. If he wandered from place to place, he would be in danger; but if he stayed in one place, he would starve. The earth had turned against him, God had turned against him, and people would turn against him. Anybody Cain met would be a relative who might want to avenge Abel’s murder. What could he do?

By hating and murdering his brother and refusing to repent, Cain created for himself an intolerable life. He opened the door to temptation (4:7) and closed the door on his family, God, and his future. No matter where he lived or what he did, Cain would always be a restless man for whom there was no remedy.

**God’s Mercy (v. 15).** God did a strange thing: He put a mark on Cain that would protect him from the assaults of people who wanted to kill him. We don’t know what this mark was or why people would recognize it as a God’s protective seal; but it worked. This was purely an act of mercy on God’s part.

Why would God allow a diabolical murderer like Cain to go free? In His mercy, God doesn’t give us what we do deserve; and in His grace, He gives us what we don’t deserve. That’s the nature of God. God spared Cain’s life, *but that wasn’t the end of the story.*

Eventually Cain died and “after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). The entire civilization that he built was destroyed in the Flood, and the record of his life is left in Holy Scripture as a warning to anybody who pretends to worship, plays with sin, and doesn’t take temptation seriously. “The way of Cain” (Jude 11) is not the narrow way that leads to life (Matt. 7:13-14).

## **The Builder**

Genesis 4:16-24 <sup>16</sup>And Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden. <sup>17</sup>And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch. <sup>18</sup>And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mehujael: and Mehujael begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech. <sup>19</sup>And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah. <sup>20</sup>And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and of such as have cattle. <sup>21</sup>And his brother's name was Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ. <sup>22</sup>And Zillah, she also bare Tubalcain, an instructor of every artificer in brass and iron: and the sister of Tubalcain was Naamah. <sup>23</sup>And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, Hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt. <sup>24</sup>If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

God kept His Word and protected Cain as he wandered. One day he found a place that seemed right for him to settle down, and he decided to build a city. The earth wouldn’t yield its strength to Cain’s labor as a farmer, but Cain could labor and build *on the earth* and succeed. However, Cain never ceased to be a fugitive, for the name of the land where he settled means “wandering.” His citizenship wasn’t in heaven (Phil. 3:20-21), nor did he have any hope to reach the heavenly city (Heb. 11:9-16). The only heaven Cain knew was his city on earth.

Was Cain a married man before he wandered from Eden, or did he find a wife during his travels? Did he tell her he had murdered his brother? We don’t know, but surely he had to explain the mark God had put on him. It was normal for Cain to seek a wife; for he not only wanted to build a city, but he also wanted to build a family. How else could his name be remembered but in his descendants? Cain didn’t know that his name and foul deeds would be written in the Word of God for everybody to read.

Cain's wife bore him a son whom he named Enoch, which is related to the Hebrew word for "consecrated." Cain named his city after his son, but we aren't told to whom or to what the city was consecrated. Six generations of Cain's descendants are named (Gen. 4:17-22), some of whom were famous.

Lamech was the first bigamist; he was also a boastful man and a killer. Why or how the young man wounded him, we don't know; but why should a young man be killed because he caused a wound? Lamech's mentioning of Cain's protection (v. 24) indicates that Cain's story was passed from generation to generation. It also suggests that Lamech thought that God's protection extended to him as well. If God would avenge a murderer like Cain, then surely He would avenge Lamech for "protecting himself." Note that Lamech wants God's protection, but he doesn't mention God's name.

The people in the city of Enoch had varied occupations. Some followed Jabal and took care of livestock (v. 20). Others learned from Jabal's brother Jubal and devoted themselves to making and playing musical instruments (v. 21). The followers of Tubal-Cain were metalworkers (v. 22), which suggests the manufacture of farm implements, building tools, and personal weapons. Cain lived in a society that was rich in culture as well as in industry and food production. In the city of Enoch, they had everything but God.

When you put Cain's family tree next to that of Seth (chap. 5), you can't help but notice the similarity in names. You have Enoch and Enosh (v. 6) and Enoch (v. 18), Mehujael and Mahalael (v. 12), Methushael and Methuselah (v. 21), and Lamech and Lamech (v. 25). Cain's Lamech has three sons (Jabal, Jubal, and Tubal-Cain), and Noah has three sons (Shem, Ham, and Japheth).

What does this similarity in names mean? Perhaps it's God's way of telling us that the godless line of Cain (which is still with us) does its best to imitate the godly line of Seth. After all, Satan is the counterfeiter. He can imitate the names of the true believers, but he can't produce the believers. There's an Enoch in both genealogies, but Cain's Enoch didn't walk with God and one day disappear and go to heaven! (v. 24) "What's in a name?" Nothing, if you don't know and belong to the Lord!

But the tragedy is that these two lines – the ungodly line of Cain and the godly line of Seth – came together and merged (6:1-2). The wall of separation came down, and this eventually created the wicked society whose sins brought on the judgment of the Flood.

Lamech's brand of violence spread (vv. 5, 11-12), and by the time of the Flood, only eight people believed God's warning and acted upon it by faith. The rest were destroyed.

Cain's family tree ends with the family of Lamech (4:19-24), an arrogant murderer whose three sons manufactured things for this world. Seth's line ends with Noah ("rest") whose three sons gave the world a new beginning after the Flood. The world of that day probably admired Cain's achievements; God wiped them off the face of the earth.

"And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17, NKJV).

Today we can choose God's way or do our own thing and choose to go our own way. Which way are you going to go in? it's time to choose.