

GENESIS 4

1) Why is Abel's sacrifice favoured by God and Cain's is not? We are not told. Is it that livestock is more precious than what is grown in the ground? More likely, it is the spirit of gratitude and generosity which was missing in Cain.

2) God's response to Cain is straightforward. And if Cain finds this difficult to receive, he should not deal with his disappointment by getting resentful, angry, or envious of his brother. Rather, he is invited to repent and do better. Also, God warns him of how sin works itself out. Sin lodges itself in the doorway of our spirits, opened by resentment, anger, envy, blaming others, etc, waiting to push us into actions that are damaging and destructive.

3) Cain, deals with his problem like all too many in the world deal with their problems. Rather than take personal responsibility for changing himself and his attitude for the better, he takes out his anger and resentment on his brother, blaming him for all his problems. By killing him, he hopes to resolve all his concerns.

4) God confronts Cain (God through conscience and conviction) with what he has done, but again, Cain refuses to take responsibility: 'Am I my brother's keeper?' he asks, angrily. But only by taking responsibility and repenting would he be helped.

5) The earth itself, which has absorbed Abel's blood, revolts. This has real implications for our understanding of human relationships with the earth and environmental abuse. Moral evil is linked to the welfare of the whole world not just human life. In biblical times the connection between human sin and the earth's destruction is seen in more mystical terms. Today, with the help of science, we see a more direct cause and effect relationship.

Actually, the problems can be traced back to a whole series of separations. It begins with the separation of God and humans (mistrust, autonomy, and self-sufficiency), followed by the separation of humans between themselves (blaming, shaming and even killing each other), followed by the separation of humans and the earth (the earth reacts to our abuse and poisons us).

6) But the story is not over. God places a protective mark on Cain. This is the same as saying that Cain belongs to God in spite of his evil. God continues to care for human beings even though human beings are now infected with the contagion of evil. Knowing evil and doing evil get tangled up.

7) Finally, Adam and Eve give birth to Seth and a new line. This is a sign of hope. Goodness continues to be born and to grow even though evil does much to destroy it.