

Background

As a reminder from our lesson on chapter 2, we don't know how much time has passed between 3:24 and 4:1. It may have been days, it may have been years or decades.

Read Genesis 4:1-5

v1 While it's obvious that Adam and Eve had (and likely were having for a while now) sex in this verse, the root wording is great. The literal term is that Adam "knew" his wife. Re-read 2:23-25 for the significance. God created sex as a sacred event (*Heb 13:4*) between a lifelong-married husband and wife. While God certainly intended sex to be pleasurable and for procreation, it is also part of the complete union of the couple. In short, failing to take God's purpose and timing for sex into account leads to broken relationships (as we see in the world around us and often from our own past).

v1-2 Adam and Eve received what they were promised: a seed. What high hopes they must have had in this first actual child on earth. The word Cain means "acquired" and appears to be related to the word for "craftsman." Her second child, Abel means "vapor"...something fleeting, like a breath...which would only have been appropriately given after what was to come in v8 :(

This leads us to believe that Cain and Abel may have been named later in their life (like Eve, their mother) in description of their lifestyle, personality or purpose. Names were not given lightly in the ancient world, and a person often had more than one. Names had meaning and were often a pun or play on another word that sounded familiar. As we've discussed before, naming someone indicated having authority over them. Knowing someone's name indicated a familiar relationship. You'll see these important facts about names come up through the OT, into the NT (e.g., *Mt 16:18, Acts 13:9*) and ending in Revelation (*Rev 2:17, 14:1, 14:11, 19:12*).

v3-4 Here begins the first of many examples of sibling rivalry (with the younger being favored) in the Bible. (e.g., Japheth and Shem, Esau and Jacob, Zerah and Perez, Manasseh and Ephraim etc)

We also have the sudden appearance of sacrifice, despite no record (for us) of God directing it.

Q (v3-4): Why did God respect Abel's offering, but not Cain's?

Some have assumed it was because Abel offered a blood sacrifice, whereas Cain offered foodstuffs. There are two problems with this:

- 1. Nothing in the text describes a need to cover sin. These offerings appear to have been for worship.**
- 2. God later directed Israel to offer both grain and meat offerings.**

The difference appears to be that Abel offered his best: the firstborn and their fat. Whereas there is no similar description of Cain's...he may have just been going through the motions (*1 Jn 3:11-12, Heb 11:3-4, Jude 1:10-11*).

A comparison can be made here as to how we serve the Lord. Some of us seek His face and will with devotion, humility and an eagerness to please. Whereas others go to church, say prayers and even serve their community...but out of tradition, a search for praise or even a feeling as if they're "good enough" on their own (self-righteousness). God knows our hearts and intents, as we'll see.

Read Genesis 4:6-11

v5-6 While we're not exactly sure how the boys knew their offering was or wasn't accepted, Cain was visibly angry that his effort did not produce fruit (pun intended) and clearly had no intention of repenting.

Q (v6-7a): Cain's behavior was an insult to God in many ways.

How did the purported "judgmental, violent God of the OT" respond?

With mercy (not giving us what we deserve) and grace (giving us what we don't deserve). God asks yet another parental rhetorical question and gently shows His son how to correct the issue. He clearly wants to maintain a relationship with Cain, despite the sin and rebellion that he's in.

Q (v7b&c): What did (does) God mean, "sin lies at the door and its desire is for you"?

Satan and our sinful nature never leave us alone...ever (1 Pt 5:8). If you give sin an inch, it will take a mile. We just saw that happen with Eve, step by step in the last chapter.

But when we accept Christ as our Savior we will no longer be tempted by sin, right? Incorrect. Christ and His Spirit give us the power to resist sin, yes. However, even with those spiritual walls raised around us, Satan will walk around them, kicking each and every brick until he finds one that's loose. Thankfully, over time, we get better at noticing those weak spots and patching them up.

I'm sure every one of us can think of a time this week (probably today!) that we gave in to sin just a little, and it took us somewhere we regretted (Ro 7:8a & 18-25). If you're having trouble "ruling over" habitual sin, then in the context of these verses, I'd first ask how much time you're spending daily in prayer or in your Bible (*)...it's a lot easier to keep sin out of our hearts and minds if we've already filled those spaces with God for the day.

(*) The time doing so should be dedicated to God. It shouldn't just be, "I read two chapters and said an 'Our Father who art in heaven' prayer at bedtime". Turn off your TV and your phone. Get up early. Whatever it takes to give Him the time He deserves. Do your friends or family members like when you're texting while they're trying to talk to you? No? Then neither does God.

v8 This was straight-up premeditated murder. One generation into humanity and murder has already surfaced. Remember this the next time someone tries to tell you that we're inherently good beings. Remember this the next time someone tries to tell you that God did not call the righteous to suffer at times. Note that Christ confirmed this event as historical fact (*Mt 23:34-35*), making Abel the first martyr. Further note that Christ publicly acknowledged his sacrifice and declared him righteous...a worthy reward (*Mt 25:21, Rev 2:10*).

v9-10 Cain has apparently reached a point of no return here and continues to defy God (despite God giving him yet another chance to confess). Cain was now a murderer and a liar...sounds familiar (*Jn 8:44*). In reality, as the elder brother, Cain was Abel's keeper in a way.

While God sees everything, the Bible confirms that He takes special note of cruel injustices (*Ex 22:21-26*) and the shedding of blood (*Gen 9:6, Jer 22:3, Heb 9:11-28*).

v11 The third curse in creation is awarded to Cain. No longer would the earth cooperate with Cain's labor; which was problematic since he was a farmer (v2). He would have to rely on others for food (everyone was still a vegetarian at this point) and that would be hard to do when he just murdered one of the only family on earth at the moment.

Read Genesis 4:12-18

v13-14 Suddenly Mr. Murder is worried about someone killing him. Cain expresses no regret at his action; only that he's going to be punished.

Q (v14-17): Wait, if Cain just killed one of the four people in existence, who was "anyone that finds me"? And where did he get a wife in v17?

The reality is, especially based upon 5:3-4, is that Adam and Eve had a lot more children than just the first two: Cain and Abel. Adam lived to be 930 years old...that's time for lots of kids. We have no idea how old Cain and Abel were when the murder occurred. In terms of our current lifespans, we assume they were in their teens or 20s...when in reality they could have been more than 100 and had many siblings.

It seems unlikely that God created more people, as we're not told of it, and it doesn't fit the problem with Adam & Eve's original sin.

As far as a wife goes, in the context of a recent "good" creation and near-perfect genes, it wouldn't have been a problem for siblings to marry one another. The prohibition of family marriages came much later (*Lev 18*), when lifespans were dramatically reduced and genes were likely damaged enough by sin, inbreeding and the environment to prohibit. If Adam & Eve's first child was a murderer in short time, it's not hard to believe that a later sister would be willing to follow him.

v15 We're not sure if this "mark" was something physical/visible or just an unseen "force" (for lack of a better term) that kept him stigmatized from others. This verse is part of what led to the punishment of branding or other marking for criminals/sinners throughout history (more recent examples such as Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Hitler's Jewish Badges, Ohio's "party plates" etc.)

Q (v15): Why did God prevent Cain's murder, going so far as threaten septuple punishment on an offender?

There are a number of likely reasons:

1. God didn't want to encourage more murder. See also *Deut 32:35*.
2. God was still being merciful to Cain, whom He loved, despite everything that had happened.
3. God had future plans for Cain and his offspring.

Q: What's the deal with seven anyway? I've heard it a lot in the Bible.

Seven stands as a number of completion or totality in the Bible. It's not always literally seven things...think of it like an example of modern hyperbole when we say, "I've got a million things to do!" You don't literally mean 1,000,000 things...you just mean a whole heck of a lot...all the things. (cf. *Mt 18:21-22, Lk 17:3-5*)

It is used frequently, along with the numbers three, twelve and forty, among others.

v16 The land of Nod may not be a literal location. It's just a wordplay on "vagabond", which is fitting for someone who "left the presence of God".

v17 This is not the more well-known Enoch coming later. But it does speak to how quickly the population was growing, if Cain was able to name a city after him.

v18 Here's the first little genealogy in the Bible. For future reference to new believers: you don't have to worry about pronouncing the names or locations in the Bible correctly. Just wing it. None of us say them correctly, either, regardless of how confident we may sound.

Read Genesis 4:19-24

v19-22 Not only was the population growing, it was accelerating in skill. People quickly picked up animal husbandry, carpentry, music, mining and metallurgy. Interestingly, these skills are only listed for Cain's line...the one alienated from God. Does that mean the faithful weren't innovators? No, but it may point to the fact that those without God tend to cling to their jobs, possessions and achievements as their measurement of fulfillment or success in life.

Q (v19-24): How is mankind progressing, in terms of sin?

Well, we've started polygamy (not part of God's original plan – 2:24) and we went from murder to boasting about murder (to others, and in the face of God).

Q: But there are a lot of examples of polygamy in the Bible! Even of godly people! Explain that!

Yes, but note some major points (this discussion could go on for a long time):

- 1. Genesis 2:24 states one man and one wife is God's plan. Whether we choose to obey or not is irrelevant.**
- 2. God is notably upset about men marrying a multitude of women in 6:2. (cf. Deut 17:14-17)**
- 3. Jesus wasn't keen on breaking God's plan for marriage (Mt 19:7-9), so we can rule out "marriage changing with the times" and confirm that while God tolerates some things, He doesn't necessarily approve. Further, there are sometimes less-obvious consequences for going against His plan, which brings us to:**
- 4. How many times do you hear of a man having multiple wives (and thus, split households of children) that turns out well? Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon etc...they all followed cultural norms (instead of God's) and ended up with a headache of marital strife and disobedient children.**

Read Genesis 4:25-26

v25 After the downer of the past twenty-some verses, we get a bittersweet ending to the chapter. Having lost their two sons to exile and death, respectively, Adam and Eve have another son to carry on the God's promise of a Seed. Seth means "to place", as in, he was "in place" of the lost child(ren).

v26 "Calling upon the name of the Lord" wasn't just people praying. The root word indicates an invitation or a proclamation of praise. This was evangelism. This is what we are still called to do today: give glory, and point people to God in whatever ways and locations He's called us to.

While God has called some to be outspoken missionaries or preachers in foreign nations, many more He places in less auspicious...even mundane locations. Act with integrity at your job. Be polite and helpful at the grocery store. Be a loving stay-at-home mother. Face adversity with faith. Forgive often. Imitate Christ. Those around you will notice this. And if they don't already know that you're a Christian, they'll ask what makes you so different...giving you opportunity to "call on the name of the Lord."