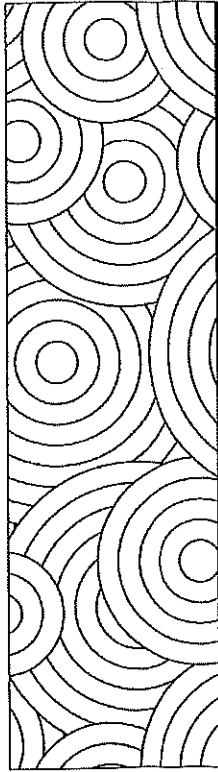


## LESSON 4

# THE FAMILY OF MAN

GENESIS 4:1-13, 25-26



### OPEN IT UP

**T**he first humans were the first sinners. Now we learn that sin multiplies and worsens through their children.

We need to be aware that people are susceptible to examples—good or bad. This is why Paul commands, “imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1), and “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’” (15:33). He understood that people exert a tremendous influence on one another. Adam and Eve should have understood the effects of sin, and they should have taught their children better. But at least one of their sons took a path, furthering sin and cutting himself off from the rest of the world.

### CAIN AND ABEL • GENESIS 4:1-8

The brothers Cain and Abel are distinguished in a number of ways. First, their names indicate different qualities. *Cain* means “possession,” and even ancient interpreters of the Bible found in Cain a model of self-infatuation, as though everything was his “possession.” *Abel*, by contrast, means “breath.” His name may relate to the brevity of his life or to his family’s treatment of him as “nothing.” Note that Eve exclaims at Cain’s birth, “I have acquired a man from the Lord” (Genesis 4:1).

But following Abel's birth, she says nothing. As her firstborn son, Cain may have been spoiled with special treatment, while Abel was largely ignored.

Second, Scripture distinguishes their occupations. "Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground" (Genesis 4:2). Adam had been given the tasks of "keeping" the garden and ruling animal creation. Now his two sons follow in his steps. Scripture informs us of the occupations for one reason—to explain their worship, the third distinguishing feature. Cain "brought an offering" (no description), whereas Abel brought the firstborn and the fat. In other words, Abel brought the best parts of the best animals (cf. Deuteronomy 12:6; 15:19). The same could not be said of Cain.

We cannot know whether God commanded the offerings of Cain and Abel and, if He did, how much specificity He offered. There is the category of "freewill offering" in the Old Testament, and it may be that Cain and Abel were not responding to any particular command but simply bringing worship before God out of gratitude. Cain, however, showed little appreciation for God and His blessings. God gives the world "every good gift and every perfect gift" (James 1:17). We neither earn nor deserve God's gifts; He simply bestows them "on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). And all He asks in return is a little gratitude. Giving thanks in worship is the least we can do.

The result of the worship is that God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's. But how? And more importantly why? There are many suggestions, but ultimately, we must admit the Bible does not tell us. What is clear at the least is that Cain's attitude was displeasing to God, and therefore his worship was rejected. Acceptable worship involves the proper actions *and* the proper attitudes. God does not care only about the *motions*; He also cares about the *emotions* (e.g., Isaiah 1:11–20).

Fourth, the brothers are distinguished by their conflict. Cain left the sacrificial scene angry. Like a father addressing an emotional son, God went to Cain, explaining the power lay within him to "rule over" the sin that was preparing to latch onto his heart (Genesis 4:7). But Cain refused to listen to the Lord. Instead, he "rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (verse 8). When John addressed the difference between Cain and Abel, he said only that "Cain ... was of

the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12). Cain seems to have blamed Abel for doing the right thing. Like a cheater focusing wrath on the whistleblower or a mobster targeting the government informant, Cain did not address the real problem (sin) but chose to release his wrath by murder.

### CAIN'S FUTURE • GENESIS 4:9-13

Having alerted Cain to the danger of his murderous urges, God approached him, asking, "Where is Abel your brother?" (Genesis 4:9). Cain showed none of the shame his parents showed when they sinned. Instead, he responded to God's question, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (verse 9). The gruesome scene is underscored by the Hebrew plural *bloods* in the statement, "The bloods of your brother are crying out to me from the ground" (verse 10). Just as the ground had been cursed because of Adam's sin, so now the ground had been polluted with the sin of Cain. And the ground demands justice!

God's punishment was just but extreme. He informed Cain, "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" (Genesis 4:11–12). Whereas Adam's work of the soil would be difficult, Cain's would be totally ineffective. For someone whose very name means "possession," it must have seemed the worst punishment to know Cain had nothing of his own. He would, from this moment forward, survive only by the generosity of others. And to make matters worse, every one of these "others" were members of his own family against whom he had created the greatest possible offense. This is why Cain protested, "My punishment is greater than I can bear" (verse 13).

### SETH • GENESIS 4:25-26

After a quick account narrating the sad history of Cain's sinful posterity, Scripture briefly returns to Adam and Eve. Their names are

mentioned in the same verse only one time in the rest of Scripture (1 Timothy 2:13). The Bible states, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth” (Genesis 4:25). *Know* is a euphemism for sexual relations throughout Genesis (verse 17; 19:5) and is an important reminder that woman is dependent upon man (3:16).

The birth of Seth is interpreted as a replacement, as it were, for Abel. “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed” (Genesis 4:25). The name *Seth* in Hebrew means “appointed” and implies that Seth was a replacement for Abel. But, in fact, Adam and Eve had lost two sons—Abel to murder and Cain to God’s forced migrations from place to place. Sin has tragic consequences and not just for the sinner or his victim. It ruins families, communities, and nations. Nevertheless, the birth of Seth marks a glimmer of hope, for Seth’s son Enosh witnessed the time when “men began to call on the name of the LORD” (verse 26). After the dominance of Cain’s sinful offspring, finally people began to look to the Lord for help.

## WRAP IT UP

The biblical story of the first family is filled with tragedy. Adam and Eve turned away from God to pursue their own sinful desires. Cain furthered the sinful designs of man by shirking his responsibility to worship appropriately and then attacking his brother Abel. Finally, he passed his sinfulness on to his family, teaching them the charms of disobedience. Only Seth and his family could save humanity from the downward spiral of sin and its consequences. Salvation would come through the righteousness of Noah, a descendant of Seth.