

GENESIS

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Chapter 4 Study Guide

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Genesis 4

I. BACKGROUND, CULTURE & EXEGESIS

What is exegesis? The careful investigation of the original meaning of a text in its historical and literary contexts; the word comes from a Greek verb meaning "to lead out of" (Greek "ex" = "out"; "ago" = "to lead/go/draw"); the opposite is Eisegesis, which means "reading [your own opinions] into" the text (not a good idea in biblical studies!)

Chapter 4 raises the following questions.

- Why do we have war?
- Why do men hate?

Some believe that this is one of the most misunderstood chapters in the Bible
This is not a story about the origin of the rivalry between shepherds and farmers.

Before you get underway please note that it is strange contradiction that the first murder came in the context of worship. It was while he was approaching God that Cain knew how much he hated his brother. This picture puts into perspective the vindictive hostility that men may express towards those whose achievements they envy.

Cain's' name = Begotten

Abel becomes the first Prophet ... his blood still speaks

Luke 11

⁴⁹Because of this, God in his wisdom said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.' ⁵⁰Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, ⁵¹from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.

Hebrews 11

⁴By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain did. By faith he was commended as a righteous man, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith he still speaks, even though he is dead.

Hebrews 12

²⁴to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.



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Now a word about the Offering?

Remember this takes place before the Torah is written out by Moses but we must understand that the Law was oral and much (if not all of it) was given to Adam in the garden and passed along orally to his descendants. Thus the Levitical system of sacrifices and offerings were known to Cain and Able.

Clue: the fat (vs 4)

Time: “at the end of the day or the process of time” = Is this a prescribed time? Once a year?

Place: “brought to the Lord” where was that?

How was the acceptance of offerings recognized? Fire from heaven?

Leviticus 9:24 Fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat portions on the altar. And when all the people saw it, they shouted for joy and fell facedown.

Judges 6:21 With the tip of the staff that was in his hand, the angel of the LORD touched the meat and the unleavened bread. Fire flared from the rock, consuming the meat and the bread. And the angel of the LORD disappeared.

1 Kings 18:38 Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench.

2 Chronicles 7:1 When Solomon finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the LORD filled the temple.

We must also note that here we have the right of the primogeniture (first-born) at stake. Cain was the firstborn. Normally, when it came to inheritance and headship of the family the firstborn son got a double portion and became the head of the family upon the passing of the father.

One can also glean from the selections of the offerings that Cain was not an infidel but was self-righteous. His offering was bloodless.

Hebrews 9:22 In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

Now consider the act. Remember this far in the narrative of this book there has been no such thing as death, when Able was lying dead Cain may have wondered what was up.



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It is not clear why Cain killed Abel: perhaps not for anything Abel did, but perhaps because of what he was. Remember Jesus warns us about murder and he raises the bar a bit.

Matthew 5:21-22 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder,^[1] and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' ²²But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother ^[2] will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca,^[3] ' is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

Oscar Wilde writes this piercing truth in his *Ballad of Reading Gaol*:

“Yet each man kills the thing he loves,
By each let this be heard,
Some do it with a bitter look,
Some will a flattering tongue.
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!”

2. THEME & AUTHORSHIP

Themes

A couple predominate themes are found in Genesis. First is fact that this is a Book of Beginnings, the great introduction to the drama of redemption.

Second, we see God preparing a people – here we have God choosing and then testing. Whether it is Abraham, Isaac, Jacob or Noah for that matter God chooses and then begins to winnow and purge. Remember the goal is to create a people who would fulfill Genesis 3:15. It will be here that the initial step will be taken for man’s redemption by a divine covenant made with a chosen race whose early history is here portrayed.

Author – Moses / **Date** - 1450 – 1410 BC

3. Theology

Although by far the most prominent theme in Chapter four of Genesis is the murder of Abel by Cain, there is an underlying theological development that has very contemporary implications. We can see from the beginning that God asked his people to make sacrifices in His honor. This story is the first of many in which the people of God sacrifice a part of their lives to give thanks or pay homage to God. In this story Cain brings his offering, “some of the fruits of the soil”. Cain worked the land as a farmer and thus brought the product of his labor to God. Now Abel tended to the flocks as a shepherd and so when it came time to bring his offering he



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“brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.” As we read the story we see that God became unhappy with the sacrifice of Cain and enjoyed the sacrifice of Abel. The question is why did God choose Abel’s sacrifice over Cain’s? This is something that has been hotly debated over the years, so let’s look at three of the main positions.

The first idea is that while Cain brought “some of the fruits of the soil”, while Abel gave God “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock.” Obviously this description makes it sound like Cain brought some random fruits and vegetables while Abel chose from his flock the best and most valuable to give to God. Obviously if this were the case we can see why God chose Abel’s offering over Cain’s. Abel gave sacrificially to God in order to please him, while Cain did not. This has obvious practical applications. God wants from us our very best; he alone should be the center of our focus and the object of our worship. When we start to hold back our talents, time and money from God he becomes displeased with our offering. We have to give God our very best, the first of our paychecks, the best hours of the day, and our most coherent thought.

The second thought on this passage would be mostly held by the reformed tradition. Most reform thought comes from historical figures such as Martin Luther and John Calvin. This doctrine in particular is unique to Calvin. One of Calvin’s primary theological positions was the sovereignty of God. Calvin looked at stories throughout the Bible, like this one, and saw a sovereign God at work in the universe. A God that made the earth obey his commands and orchestrated human history through his divine will. Calvin, and subsequently his followers, would look at this passage and say that it was God’s sovereign choice to accept Abel’s offering and not Cain’s. It had little or nothing to do with the offering itself, it was just His choice. Now this may not seem fair or logical at first but think about other decisions God made throughout the Bible. He chose, for no apparent reason, the Jews to make his people, He chose Abram to be the leader of His people, He chose Isaac over Ishmael, and chose Jacob over Esau in spite of Jacob’s shady dealings. This is certainly a tough lesson to swallow because we want to think that we have control over how God acts in history, but that certainly is not always the case.

The third is really the simplest of the three; the answer is that we simply don’t have any idea why God chose Abel’s offering over Isaac’s. The two previous thoughts are purely conjecture because God doesn’t make clear the reasoning behind his decision. He doesn’t say, “I accept Abel’s offering because I like red meat, or I don’t accept Cain’s because I’m not a big fan of radishes and besides Cain, you have bad breath.” He just doesn’t say, so sometimes it is wise of us to simply say, man we have no idea why he did that. What we do know is that Cain reacted in the worst possible way to God’s decision by killing his brother. That, if nothing else, we can take away from this passage.



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4. ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

God is Omniscient (Having total knowledge, knowing everything)

- God will respect the giver of one offering over another (Genesis 4:4-5)
- God can curse man (Genesis 4:11)
- God can change the course of a mans life (Genesis 4:12)

God is Omnipresent (present everywhere simultaneously)

- God speaks to man (Genesis 4:6)
- God knows when a man dies (Genesis 4:9)
- God can protect man from his enemies (Genesis 4:15)

God is Omnipotent (Unlimited or universal power, authority or force, all powerful)

- God is sympathetic to man (Genesis 4:6)
- God can change the course of a mans life (Genesis 4:12)
- God can protect man from his enemies (Genesis 4:15)
- God has grace for man even when he is disobedient (Genesis 4:15-17)

5. WORD STUDIES

Genesis 4:15

The curse on Cain

Word “mark”  Pronounced: 'owth {oth}

Sign, signal, warning, a distinguishing mark, a remembrance probably from 0225 (in the sense of appearing)

How he is marked in wrath: *The Lord set a mark upon Cain*, to distinguish him from the rest of mankind and to notify that he was the man that murdered his brother, whom nobody must harm. God marked him (as some malefactors are burnt in the cheek), and put upon him such a visible sign of disgrace on him that would make all wise people shun him, so that he could not be otherwise than a fugitive. This mark may be seen as a protective mark upon Cain not to kill him as the population of the earth was low as it was. What the mark was no one actually knows.

6. PROPHECIES OF CHRIST – GOSPEL COMPONENT

In Genesis 4:1 Eve has given birth to Cain. Born naturally, he brought forth the results of a fallen human race. He goes on to kill his brother, what a contrast between the first-born child and the “first-born over all creation,” Jesus Christ.



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In Genesis 4:2, we see the birth of the second child: *“Again, she gave birth to his brother Abel.”* As the two grow up we are brought to the question of acceptable and unacceptable worship this side of the fall. For the offering of Abel, the *“Lord had regard for Abel and for his offering”* (verse 4). *“But for Cain and for his offering He had no regard”* (Verse 5).

Hebrews 11:4 tells us what was involved: *“By faith, Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.”* The distinction is that Abel’s sacrifice was by faith. The Bible does not tell us how he knew what to bring as an offering at all. Yet, this is not unusual; in the book of Genesis information has been often given that we do not know has already been given until someone acts on it—for example the clean and the unclean animals at the time of Noah (Gen.7:2) or Abraham and the tithe (Gen. 14:20). So here it is clear that Abel did have knowledge about offering even though the Bible has not told us when this knowledge was given.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching he said *“Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”* (John 1:29). We see here that John the Baptist gives no explanation. He doesn’t need to, because the Jews understood the OT emphasis at this point. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul calls Christ our Passover, expecting understanding without explanation. The book of Hebrews draws the parallel of the death of Christ and the OT sacrifices. Revelation 5:11-12 refers to Jesus as the Lamb of God who has been slain and is therefore worthy to receive the power and the glory. Revelation 13:8 states that He is *“the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”* Jesus IS the substance of the true believers faith.

7. BIBLE DIFFICULTIES / PROBLEM PASSAGES

1. What had Cain done wrong? (4:5-8)

Apparently Cain’s motives and attitudes were unacceptable to God; it was reflected in his offering. Instead of repenting of his wrongdoings, Cain became angry and we discover, filled with jealousy (v.8). The Bible tells us that because of Abel’s faith, his sacrifice was better than Cain’s (Heb. 11:4 By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks). Abel first offered himself and then brought the best and most expensive portion to God. It was not Cain’s offering itself that was wrong; grain offerings and harvest offerings would later be legitimate expressions of worship. But God is pleased with a pure heart, which Cain’s was not. (Heb. 9:22, And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission), (Lev. 6:14-23, There is the law of the grain offering: The sons of Aaron shall offer it on the altar before the Lord. He shall take from it his handful of the fine flour of



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the grain offering, with its oil, and all the frankincense which is on the grain offering, and shall burn it on the altar for a sweet aroma, as a memorial to the Lord. And the remainder of it Aaron and his sons shall eat; with unleavened bread it shall be eaten in a Holy Place; in the court of the tabernacle of meeting they shall eat it. It shall not be baked with leaven. I have given it as their portion of my offering made by fire; it is most holy like the sin offering and the trespass offering. All the males among the children of Aaron may eat it. It shall be a statute forever in your generations concerning the offering made by fire to the Lord. Everyone who touches them must be holy. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying this is the offering of Aaron and his sons, which they shall offer to the Lord beginning on the day when he is anointed: one-tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a daily grain offering, half of it in the morning and half of it at night. It shall be made in a pan with oil. When it is mixed, you shall bring it in. The baked pieces of the grain offering you shall offer for a sweet aroma to the Lord. The priest from among his sons, who is anointed in his place, shall offer it. It is a statute forever to the Lord. It shall be wholly burned. For every grain offering for the priest shall be wholly burned. It shall not be eaten) and the Ps. 40:6-8. Sacrifice and offering you did not desire; my ears you have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering you did not require. Then I said Behold I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do your will, O my God, and your law is within my heart.

2. Why didn't God sentence Cain to death? (4:15)

The murder was stunning and its lack of precedent, its suddenness, and its finality, Jesus spoke of this ghastly event as a historical fact (Matt. 23:35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar). Sadly Cain expressed no repentance for this dreadful act, in Genesis 4:15 Then the Lord said to him, therefore, whoever kills Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark on Cain, lest anyone finding him should kill him. God was showing mercy and protection for Cain and also allowing the opportunity for Cain to ask God for grace and forgiveness for his sin. (John 8:3- 11 Then the scribes and Pharisees brought to Him a woman caught in adultery. And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him, Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do you say? This they said, testing Him, that they might have something of which to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and wrote on the ground with His finger, as though He did not hear. So when they continued asking Him, He raised Himself up and said to them, He who is without sin among you, let him throw a stone at her first. And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. Then those who heard it, being



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convicted by their conscience, went out one by one, beginning with the oldest even to the last. And Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had raised Himself up and saw no one but the woman, He said to her, Woman, where are those accusers of yours? She said, No one Lord. And Jesus said to her, neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more).

3. Where did Cain find his wife? (4:17)

Adam had son's daughters, (5:4) so Cain's wife was probably a sister (though some speculate that God may have created other human beings besides Adam and Eve). Marriages between close relatives were at first unavoidable since the whole human race came from a single pair. Only later was marriage between siblings prohibited (Lev. 18-6-18).

8. SOUL WINNERS SO WHAT

What offering are you giving to God? The fall of Cain was as a result of God respecting the offering of his brother. Had Cain given an offering that was worthy of God, this whole thing might not have happened. What offering are you giving God, part of your life, the crippled calf...give Him your absolute best!

Jesus who is the perfect sacrifice is pictured throughout the Old Testament as the substance of faith, in which the saints of old walked by. God has always commanded an acceptable offering, although that which was acceptable back in Abel's day was only a for-shadowing of the once and for all sacrifice that was to come—Jesus Christ, thee perfect sacrifice. Share that nugget of eternal truth today!

To me the essence of the chapter that needs to be shared is the presence and power of sin depicted for the first time in our fallen world. This destructive power is at the root of all evil and explains all enmity in relationships. The chapter and verse pertaining to Cain is also the root of all pastoral and Christian counseling, "If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it... (Genesis 4:7 NRSV)"

Many Christians, like Cain don't feel bad about their sin, rather their punishment. We must kill our pride and remember it's about the justification of the sinner by God not the justification of our own sin by us.



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"One of the consequences of sin is that it makes the sinner pity himself instead of causing him to turn to God. One of the first signs of new life is that the individual takes sides with God against himself." (Barnhouse)

Know that must direct us to the humble realization and desperate need of a Savior. Amen.

Why are names important in the Bible?

Sometimes a name was prophetic, or named for something in nature, or personality, or appearance at birth, or God sometimes gave certain people new names. Indicating God's plan for a child's life. The name Jesus is a good example; it means deliverer, or savior. Amen.

This is the first murder. How did it happen? Sin turned him into a killer (sin ruled over him). Greed, anger, jealousy and he refused to repent. Today many young people cannot handle their anger and rejection and resort to killing having no remorse like Cain. It is amazing to see it happened when the earth was created and is still happening today.