

5. Cain and Abel (4:1-26)

I. Structure

Genesis 4 is a genealogy in 3 parts (a man knew his wife and she bore a son), with multiple insertions.

1. Adam knew his wife and she bore a son: Cain & Abel (1-16)
2. Cain knew his wife and she bore a son: Cain's line (17-24)
3. Adam again knew his wife and she bore a son: Seth (25-26)

Insertions

1. Naming formulae:
 - a. Cain
 - b. Seth
 - c. Enosh (no explanation given)
2. Secondary genealogy: Abel (2a)
3. Narrative insertions:
 - a. Cain + Abel (2b-16)
 - b. Cain's city (17b)
 - c. Lamech (19-24)
 - d. calling on name of Yahweh (26)

II. Adam's first genealogy (4:1-24)

Naming formula: Eve names son Cain (יָקַן *Qayin*) because she has gained (קָנָה *qanah*) him. Her focus is on what she has gained.

Secondary genealogy: Cain's brother Abel. No meaning is given for the name. We're not told how much time passes in "again"; if minutes, then Cain and Abel are twins.

A. First narrative insertion: Cain and Abel (2b-16)

1. Structure

Chiastic structure focuses attention on Cain's murder of Abel.

A	2b-5	narrative	Cain+Abel active, Yahweh passive, Cain+Abel approach Yahweh
B	6-7	dialog	Yahweh questions Cain
C	8	narrative	Cain+Abel
B'	9-14	dialog	Yahweh questions Cain
A'	15-16	narrative	Yahweh active, Cain passive, Cain departs from Yahweh

A. Cain and Abel approach Yahweh (2b-5)

Chiastic structure in 2b-5a contrasts Cain and Abel, switching order Cain-Abel, Abel-Cain, Cain-Abel.

Occupation (2b):

וַיְהִי־הַבֶּל רֹעֵה צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה

Offering (3b-4a):

וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה וְהַבֶּל הֵבִיא גַם־הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחֶלְבֵהֶן

Yhwh's response (4b-5a):

וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל־הַבֶּל וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ וְאֶל־קַיִן וְאֶל־מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה

Occupation (2b):

Abel was a keeper of flocks but Cain was a tiller of the ground

Offering (3b-4a):

Cain brought of the fruit of the ground... but Abel brought of the first-born of his flock

Yhwh's response (4b-5a):

Yahweh regarded Abel and his offering but Cain and his offering he did not regard

1. **Occupation** (2b): Abel is a keeper of sheep (רֹעֵה צֹאן); Cain a worker of the ground (עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה) cf. 2:5; 3:23. These are the earliest occupations of domesticated life, tending domesticated animals and arable plants; essential fore-runners of civilization.
2. **Offering** (3-4a): “In the course of time” perhaps means at the end of the season, when the flock had yielded its offspring and the ground its produce. Cain and Abel each brought a מִנְחָה *minḥah*, a tribute offering. This did not need to be an animal sacrifice (contra much preaching). But Abel brings the best that he had (firstborn of his flock and their fat portions, i.e. the best parts of the best animals), whereas Cain did not. Their offerings indicated their heart. Abel offering indicated that he offered himself along with his offering.
3. **Yahweh's response** (4b-5a): he looked on both offerers and their offerings. How did Cain know that the Lord had rejected him and his offering? Perhaps all he had to do was look at his brother (cf. Annie Vallotton's drawing in the *Good News Bible*).

Cain's response (5b): he was very angry and his countenance fell.

B. Yahweh dialogs with Cain (6-7)

Cain presumably knows what it is to do well (good). Yahweh presumably offers Cain the opportunity to reverse his actions. Cain has not acted appropriately (has not acted righteously); if he doesn't watch out, sin is about to overwhelm him.

Warning: “sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it” (7).

Is this:

- a promise: you *will* rule over it
- a command: you *must* rule over it
- a possibility: you *can* rule over it.

cf. “Your desire shall be for your husband, but he shall rule over you” (3:16).

Cain does not reply.

C. Cain kills Abel (8)

center-line of chiastic structure. Cain's murder of Abel is presented very briefly.

B' Yahweh dialogs with Cain (9-12)

Two opportunities for confession: where? what? Echoes of same questions Yahweh asked Adam & Eve. “Where is your brother?” “Am I my brother's keeper?”

Abel 7×, brother 7×.

Seven times we are told that Abel is Cain's brother, never that Cain is Abel's brother.

“Cain has a brother but *is not* a brother, whereas Abel is a brother but *does not have* a brother” (Volf, *Exclusion & Embrace*, quoting van Wolde). “To have a brother one must *be* a brother and ‘keep’ a brother.

Is there hope for Cain who had a brother but was not a brother and who killed the brother he should have been keeping?” (Volf, *Exclusion*, 97)

5. Cain and Abel (4:1-26)

Abel 7×, brother 7×, in 10 groupings (McEntire, Blood of Abel, 23-24). Focuses on v. 8 as center.

- his brother, Abel (2a)
- Abel (2b, 4a, 4b)
- Abel, his brother (8a, 8b), Abel, your brother (9a)
- my brother (9b), your brother (10, 11)

Abel (הֶבֶל *Hebel*) means *vapor, breath*. Used 38× (of OT 73×) in Ecclesiastes (vanity of vanities, all is vanity).

Curse: for the first time, a human is cursed, i.e. consigned to futility.

A' Cain departs the presence of Yahweh (15b-16)

Intensification of exile: Adam and Eve exiled (גרשׁ) from גֶּן garden → אֲדָמָה ground; Cain exiled from אֲדָמָה ground. He hides himself from God.

B. Second narrative insertion: Cain builds a city (17b)

God told Cain he would be a vagrant and wanderer, but now he seeks to settle down.

God promised protection, but now Cain seeks his own protection in city of his own making: he is a city-builder בִּנְיָה עִיר.

C. Third narrative insertion: Lamech (19-24)

7th generation from Adam through Cain (Adam-Cain-Enoch-Irad-Mehujael-Methushael-Lamech).

1. Cultural development

- Jabal: pastoral nomads אָבִי יֵשֶׁב אֹהֶל וּמִקְנָה.
- Jubal: musicians אָבִי כָל-הַפֶּסֶם כְּנֹר וְעוּבָב.
- Tubal-Cain: metal-workers לִטֵּשׁ כָּל-הַחֹרֶשׁ נְחָשֶׁת וּבְרָזָל.

But intensification of sin, reaching a climax in the self-centered boast of Lamech, 7th in line from Adam.

D. Adam's second genealogy (4:25-26)

Naming formula: Eve names son Seth (שֵׁת *Shet*) because God has set (שִׁית). Her focus is now on what Yahweh has given.

While Cain's line heads to a dead-end, the replacement line begins to call on the name of Yahweh.

III. Two Lines

There are two ways of living life. Gen 4:1-6:8 draws a distinction between those who have faith and those who don't, between those who walk with God and those who walk without God. This distinction is portrayed three times: between Cain and Abel, between the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth, and between Lamech and Enoch.

A. The Distinction between Cain and Abel

Cain and Abel show the difference between acceptable and unacceptable worship. The key to acceptable worship is faith.

- **Abel** brought to God the best of what he had, the first fruits; because he had faith (Heb 11:4).
- **Cain** brought just an ordinary offering, thus showing indifference to God.

Because of their heart attitudes, Abel’s actions were righteous, Cain’s evil (1 John 3:12). Ever since, there have been two humanities: those who walk in the way of Abel (he is the first member of the Hall of Faith, Hebrews 11), and those who walk in the way of Cain (Jude 11).

B. The Distinction between the Cainites and the Sethites

1. **Cainites:** The Cainite line showed great cultural development and became a sophisticated society. But it was a sinful, self-focused, self-sufficient society with no spiritual development. Living outside the presence of God always results in moral failure, no matter what the degree of technical or cultural achievement. The story of Cain’s descendants ends at 4:24. As the eldest son, blessing should have been continued through Cain, but “in the history of salvation the family of Cain is an irrelevance” (Kidner 1967, 80).
2. **Sethites:** No mention is made of any cultural development, as the author wanted to draw attention to their spiritual development. They called upon God (4:26). They were spiritually focused amid an evil generation. Whereas the Cainites end, the Sethites continue, their genealogy being developed in Gen 5.

1. The Distinction Between Lamech and Enoch

The contrast between the two lines is painted most vividly in the 7th generation: Lamech and Enoch.

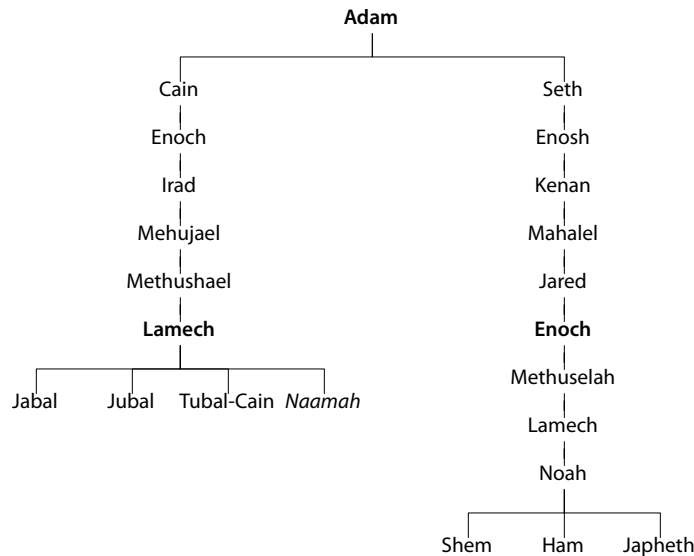


Fig. 5-1: The generations of Adam through Cain and Seth

- **Lamech:** pride, arrogance, hatred, polygamy, self-centered. Lamech was far worse than Cain: he boasted of his misdeeds and looked for provocation.
- **Enoch:** walked with God.